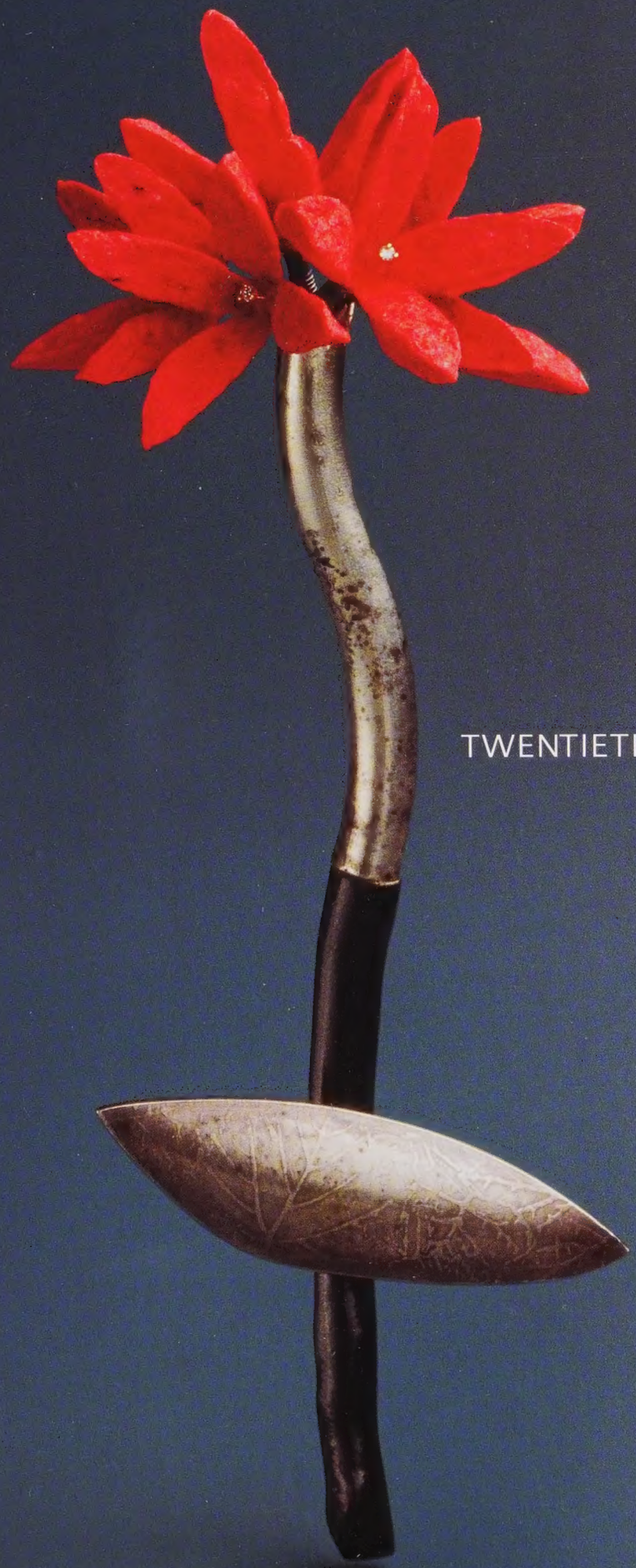
METALSMITH

FALL 2000



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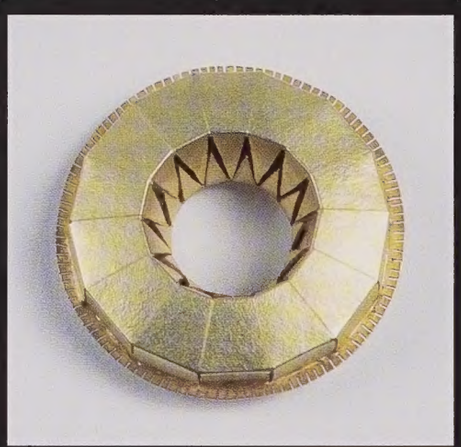

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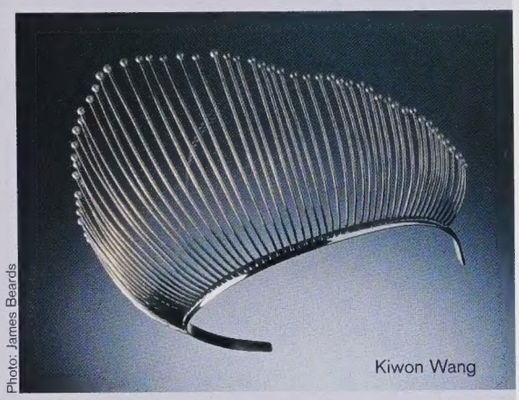
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METALSMITH VOL 20 NUMBER 5

cover
Eun-Mee Chung
Passion (brooch), 1999
18k, sterling, diamond, paper
5 x 1 1/2 x 1 1/2"

top left
Eun-Mee Chung
Passion (brooch), 1999
18k, sterling, diamond, paper
5 x 1 1/2 x 1 1/2"

middle left
David Damkoehler
Fast Lane Teapot, 1998
tig-welded, cold-forged, lathe turned, milled, stainless steel
18 3/4 x 7"
Photograph by Michael Mau

bottom left
The Golden Age of Helmets
Burgonet of the Guard of Pope Julius III: Italy (Brescia); ca. 1550–1555
steel, gold, brass
weight 3 lb. 14 oz.

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FROM THE EDITOR
FRANK LEWIS

Generally as we grow older, I hesitate to say mature, we develop a sense of forbearance and forgiveness. Our experiences teach us that each little event is less individually important, that it is the sum of those moments and acts that define a life. I can not help but be reminded of this as I think about *Metalsmith*'s twentieth anniversary.

During my tenure as editor, various Boards, design teams, and I have discussed changes, tweaked the magazine, created a fifth edition (the Exhibition in Print), second guessed the coverage of a particular craftsperson, and spoken about the magazine's mission and goals. Each and every conversation seemed fraught with importance, as if changing from dull to glossy stock, putting a work made of plastic on the cover, or including metallic inks would radically alter the thing that we had worked so hard to maintain. At the time, the weight of those decisions was heavy, in retrospect, looking at the beauty and continuing professionalism of *Metalsmith* our anguish seems overwrought. What the last twenty years should indicate to everyone is that this field, and this magazine which represents it, is far too strong and lasting to be threatened by a design trend, or faddish work that was discussed and that failed to withstand the test of time.

Thumbing through the various back issues on my desk is like looking at an album of family photographs. "Can you believe that we ever wore bell bottoms that ugly?" "Whatever happened to cousin Wilbur?" "Didn't little Livonia turn out to be quite the success?" Certain events like weddings and graduations, pop psychologists call them "passages," become moments that take on a greater aura, others like funerals, remind us of inalterable changes, but more often than not, it is the informal snapshot, the yearly sequence of the family around the holiday table that over time reminds us who we are, where we come from, and that gives us strength in facing the future.

Of course Sarah Bodine, Virginia Croft, and I feel good when a young artist we chose to cover proves his or her mettle and becomes a prolific, honored, and respected member of the field. Writers are flattered when an article they have written is quoted or footnoted in a museum catalogue, or scholarly article. But the last twenty years is equally served by the so-called margins. The coverage of who we were in 1981, what were the burning issues in 1992, and what was the variety of materials and techniques represented in the 1997 EiP.

Two decades ago twenty years would have seemed to me to be a very long time. Today it seems like recent history. With each new issue of this magazine, every preceding issue is subtly altered. We build, we grow, occasionally we suffer a setback, names on the masthead change, some craftspeople seem to disappear, others shine more brightly with each passing volume. The field, the magazine, the contributors all deserve kudos. At the same time, however, we all need to keep plugging away. Congratulations *Metalsmith*, what's next? ■

FCL

METALSMITH

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the organization for jewelers,
designers and metalsmiths

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J. FRED WOELL

THE ARTS, WHO NEEDS 'EM!

Frequent attempts in Congress to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities speak dramatically about where the arts stand in the public esteem. The fact that all government support of the arts has not been withdrawn, but only significantly reduced is amazing when one realizes that the government seems to have an uninhibited desire to spend money in the areas of fighting crime, and national defense.

We are a nation of more than a disastrous, national financial debt. We are a people with a serious case of spiritual bankruptcy. We need to come to grips with something more important and significant than personal achievement in the marketplace or at a well-orchestrated prayer meeting. I believe the real message and issue we face regards the riches that lie in each of us that we are not acknowledging or exercising. I am talking about the unique creative self that is in everyone. I am referring to the arts!

Alan Alda stated it well some years ago in a Commencement Address he made at his daughter's graduation:

Be brave enough to live creatively. The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You can't get there by bus, only by hard work and risk, and by not quite knowing what you are doing. What you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover will be yourself.

We all acknowledge that we need proper shelter. We need clothes to keep us protected from the elements. We need to have a good balanced diet. We need to exercise on a regular basis, and we should have regular check-ups for dental and health maintenance. These are obvious. We don't all exercise as much as we should, and though many of us can afford to eat well-balanced meals, we don't. But if we can afford it, we will live in the best and fanciest dwellings and we will surround ourselves with "things" that will "seem" to fulfill what we will not acknowledge: a bankrupt spirit.

It has amazed me over my sixty plus years of living just how we respond to our spiritual emptiness by going on a shopping spree and purchasing all kinds of things we don't really want and certainly don't need. I'm not free of this deficit myself; I'm just as much a part of the cycle as the next person and I don't mean to simply point a finger.

A great number of people have spoken regarding the importance of art and nature in human lives. The two concepts are closely linked in my mind. One helps to better appreciate the other. John Muir wrote:

Thousands of nerve-shaken overcivilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is necessary and that mountain peaks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.

Have you ever stood alone in a place of great natural beauty and breathed the air, been emotionally lifted by the soaring of a bird, watched as wild life fed and romped through the wilds; just you, alone, without the rush of vehicles rumbling behind you on the interstate?

Have you ever sat in a concert hall listening to music that is so inspiring that everything else in your mind disappears for what may seem like an instant, and you feel real peace, alone, yet not lonely? I can remember several instances where the arts have spoken to me in such a way. Those moments confirm my feelings as to just how important the arts are to each of us. I vividly recall a moment at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. Strolling through the Egyptian wing, I came upon a display case containing a beautiful yellow gold spoon. The spoon's handle was in the shape of a elegantly clothed female figure cupping the spoon bowl in her hands. It was both perfectly functional and exquisitely crafted down to the finest details of the folds of her garment bedecked with gemstones. It was a feast of precious materials and design, but it was for a moment something much more to me. It was alive! I could feel the energy of the artist who created that object over 2,000 years earlier pulsing into me and filling me with a measure of peace and happiness, in the midst of a very busy corridor of the museum. It was electric, and I went away feeling richer and connected with something I still can't explain to this day, though I continue to think about it still. I believe that there was something about that moment, that encounter with an object that had nothing to do with a "thing" in the materialistic sense, but with another kind of richness.

Years ago after a devastating divorce I received a book entitled: *How to Recover from a Lost Love*. It was written in a unique fashion. The book took one through the steps of loss in a very clear didactic manner. What made the book memorable was that it included poetry. A somewhat clinical description of the emotional stages in loss was always opposite a page with a poem that expressed in verse what had been described in clear methodical words on the facing page. I remember that book to this day. Just reading what I was going through did nothing to help my emotional needs. However, the poem on the facing page did. I found myself rereading the poems again and again, weeping and sobbing as I read. I felt then and feel today, that it was the poetry that helped me through the divorce and not the more scientific description of what I was experiencing that healed me.

As humans we are connected to something that is very powerful and mysterious. We have tried to ignore or explain the spiritual by establishing institutions to get us through this mystery. It isn't working! We are emotionally a very sick nation and we have yet to realize the two things that are most important to obtaining a balance: the arts and nature. We constantly ignore or abuse both of them. We are in deep trouble and balancing the Federal budget will do little if anything to make us happier or healthier until we recognize this fact and recognize it in a significant way. ■

Fred J. Woell is a metalsmith who lives in Deer Isle, Maine.

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May 31 - June 4, 2001

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June 2001

Calendar:

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January 12-14, 2001
Preliminary slide jury to select participating artists

January 31, 2001
Deadline for invited artists to submit completed ring for jury selection of the final 101 rings

February 2, 2001
Jury selection of rings to be documented in the exhibition catalogue

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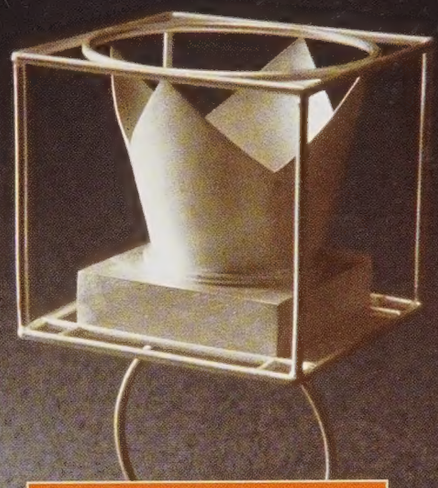

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BOOK REVIEW
GARY S. GRIFFIN

EDGAR BRANDT, MASTER OF ART DECO IRONWORK

BY JOAN KAHR

HARRY N. ABRAMS, INC., PUBLISHER

Many of us find inspiration in works from the past generated by those who are often viewed as principals in the history of our field. Such inspiration is now available in Joan Kahr's recently published book on the French metalsmith Edgar Brandt. Kahr, a frequent contributor to *Metalsmith*, presents Brandt's work in 232 illustrations, sixty in color. The well-written, approachable 240-page text gives the reader a remarkable view of Brandt's life from early childhood onward.

The text presents Brandt's education, the teachers who influenced him and the family that nurtured his interests. With remarkable precision, the book details the evolution of Brandt's career as it contextualizes his work within the first half of the twentieth century. In effect, one learns not only of Edgar Brandt, but also of those other creative individuals who surrounded him at this extraordinary period of time.

Brandt's work speaks to an age and subsequently becomes a physical manifestation of an art history as well as a world history. Kahr's exhaustive research on these objects gives us an insight into the times, the values, and economies that impacted the works. From the text, one is exposed to French nationalism as manifested through France's belief in the stylistic superiority of her fine and applied arts. Through exposure to these ideological beliefs, one can follow the development of international expositions expressly conceived for the purpose of reaffirming and further developing that nation's position in the world.

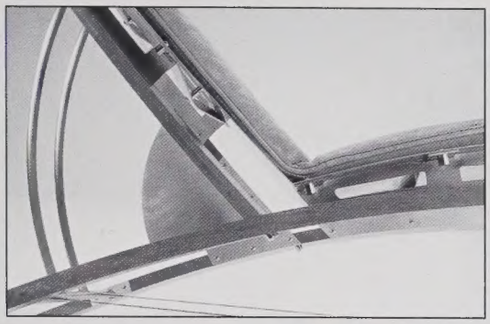
Edgar Brandt was very much aware of the decorative art history that preceded him. His entrepreneurial skills together with his pragmatic sensibilities made it possible for him to recognize the failure of Ruskinian craftsmanship. His belief in and practice of varied technical means allowed him a greater latitude of expression through industrial means of production. With beauty and use as fundamental values, Brandt was able to systematically and purposefully effect commerce and subsequently make significant contributions to art history.

German intellectual values focusing on the functional essence of design revolutionized the concept of decoration in the 1930s. This reinterpretation promoted anonymous, utilitarian beauty and shifted processes to industrial means, and materials away from iron and bronze to newer metals and alloys. The sleek, austere look of modernism prevailed. This fact did not designate the end of Edgar Brandt's production, but it did impart a change that marked the setting of the sun on his elaborate forged production. In effect, a golden age of ornament was eclipsed.

I highly recommend this book as it will certainly inspire those who seek a productive life within the applied and decorative arts. Edgar Brandt's work offers us a model related to a means of production, as well as, a method of distribution of products and services while simultaneously offering an example of the highest quality design. This book offers up a yardstick as to what can be accomplished in a lifetime.

Brava Joan Kahr. ■

Gary S. Griffin is Artist in Residence, and Head of Metalsmithing at the Cranbrook Academy of Art.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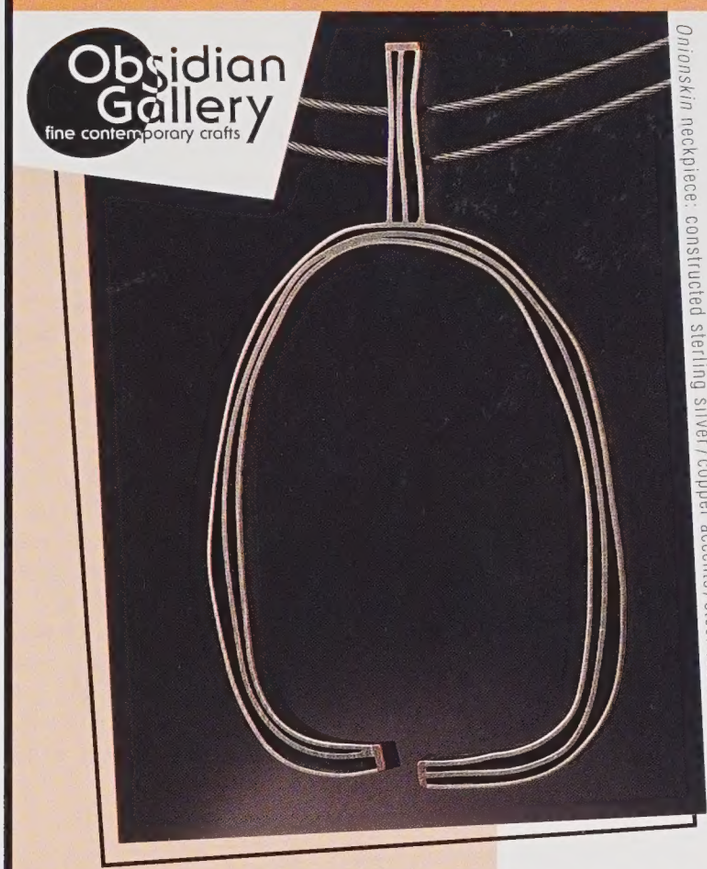

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LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Lewis,

Your 2000 issue of *Metalsmith* had an exceptionally beautiful memorial to Fred Miller.

I have been a silversmith since 1938 and I met Fred when he was in the Cleveland School of Art, where his creative ability was, even then, very apparent. Years later seeing him work at one of my month long H&H conferences, seeing him responding to techniques new to him, I knew he was arriving as a leading American craftsman.

I regret Jeannine Falino's "an American interpreter of Scandinavian style." I know that Fred only produced to express his own identity and had no need to depend on any one else. Also no conference teacher would have considered it ethical to allow a Conferee to be influenced by the work of others.

Also I wish to say that Jeannine has done an enormous amount of good for the American craftsman. It is not too long ago that museums did not consider contemporary crafts as art for showing much less collecting. She changed that at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. I appreciate your attention.

Very truly yours,
Margaret Craver Withers

Dear Editor,

In *The Problem of the Fountain* (Summer 2000), the author spouts a theory that art and craft are "two different things... and that they are not fully commensurate." He claims that "the primary cause of craft is in the labor, not the idea." Based on his "extended observation of craft education and culture," he finds craftspeople and artists different. Born with "genetic predispositions" for particular traditional craft materials, craftspeople "awaken" to and form emotional bonds with them. Medium always comes first. Artists, however, all of whom make what he calls "Conceptual Art," must submit to the "doctrine of disposable mediums" in order for their ideas to remain "primary." There are two cultures that one must choose between. "Loyalty to medium," he writes, "defines a fault line between art culture and craft culture."

If this is the case, one must ask why the author's next article for *Metalsmith*, proposing a theory of craft, is necessary. Leave theories to the artists and intellectuals! Ideas are the anti-craft! Genetic testing to determine who has been "endowed" with craft "talent" and an oath of loyalty to medium should weed out artists who aspire to be metalsmiths. Demand answers: Do you now or have you ever subscribed to an art magazine? Have you ever purchased or read books published by a university press? Have you ever subordinated your medium to an idea? What about your friends? Do you swear to be loyal and dedicate your life to your medium, so help you God? This would keep art culture and craft culture separate. I am convinced!

Sincerely,
Susan Kingsley

Dear Mr. Lewis:

After I finished reading Bruce Metcalf's latest bit of philosophical self-torture, it struck me that it might be fun to write a lengthy rebuttal for your publication and provide a bit more grist to grind his teeth against. However, after noticing how you treat writers I decided against it.

For some reason you, in company with Martha Stewart's magazine, have decided that writers are no longer authors or even writers they are simply creators of text. Text? Text? I have written perhaps forty articles over the years and I consider myself - dare I say a wordsmith! At any rate no less a craftsman - dare I say an artist than the jewelers who are discussed in your publication. Do you call the brooches, pendants and rings they create just stuff. "Metalwork by... "

"Text" is, according to the primary definition in The American Heritage Dictionary: "the wording or words of something written or printed". Text is a bunch of words! "Text" connotes sterility, lack of structure and lack of creativity. Text is the stuff purchased by magazine editors that call writers "content providers;" in short it is an insult. What's wrong with "written by?"

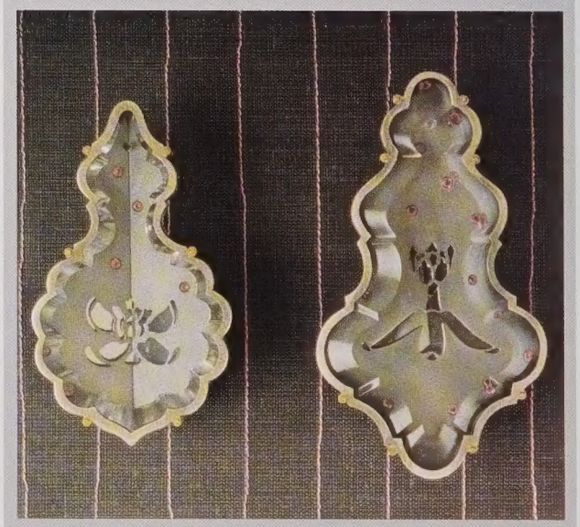
As a famous editor once wrote "words have as much history, influence, associations and familiarity as materials." Think about it!

Text by,
Richard W. Wise

Correction

In the *Exhibition in Print 2000*, p.44, the following image of Sondra Sherman's pendant set, Gertrude and Alice, was mistakenly printed upside down. Here is the correct image. We sincerely regret this error and apologize to Ms. Sherman.

The Editor



above *Gertrude and Alice* (pendant set with box), 2000, sterling, 18k, mirror, crystals, tourmalines, $2\frac{3}{4} \times 2 \times \frac{3}{8}$". Photograph by Robert Sturm

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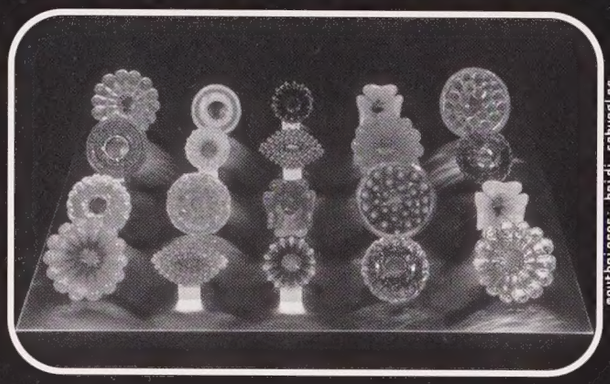

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Kiwon Wang, Ring from Dream Series, 1998

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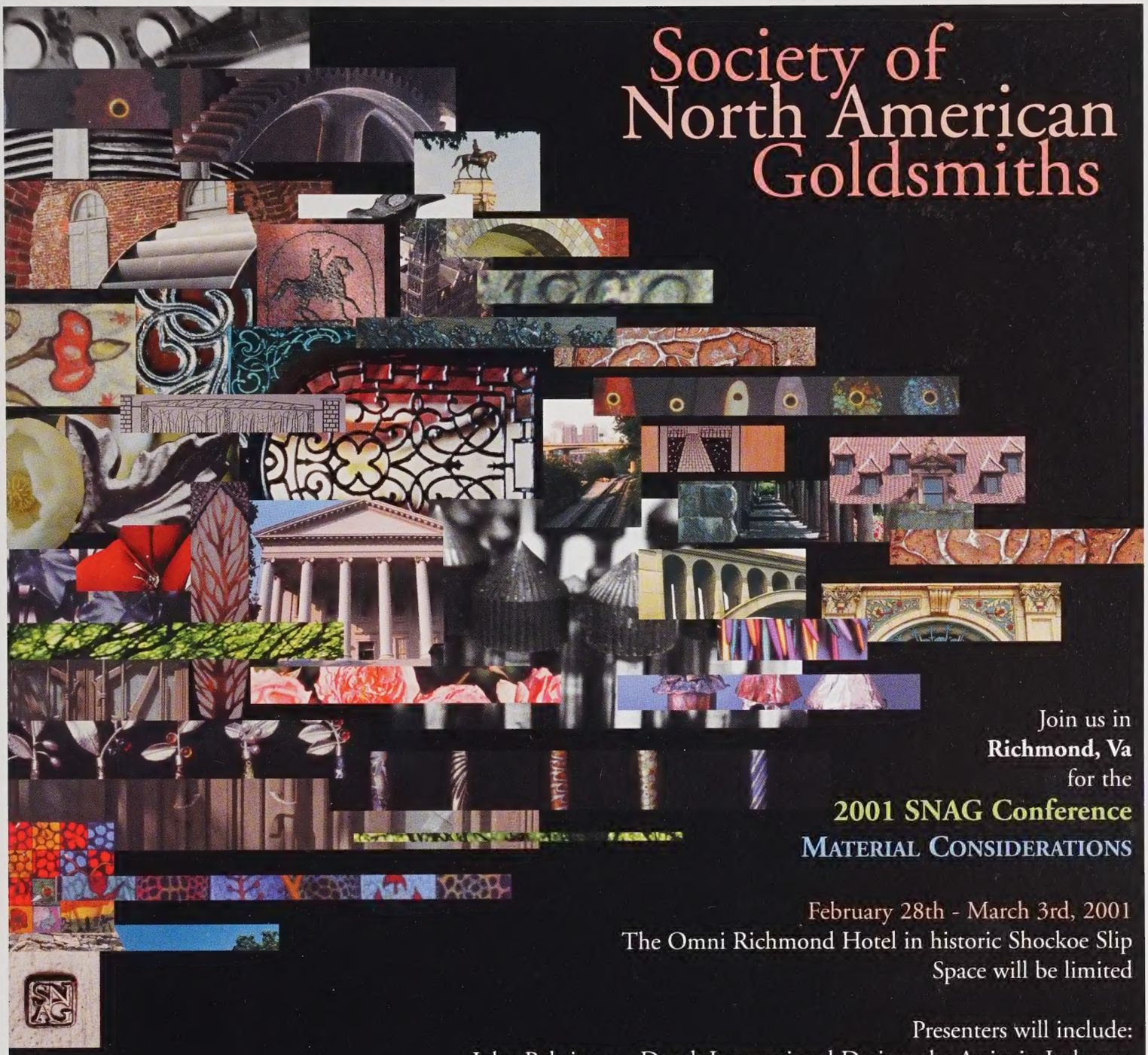

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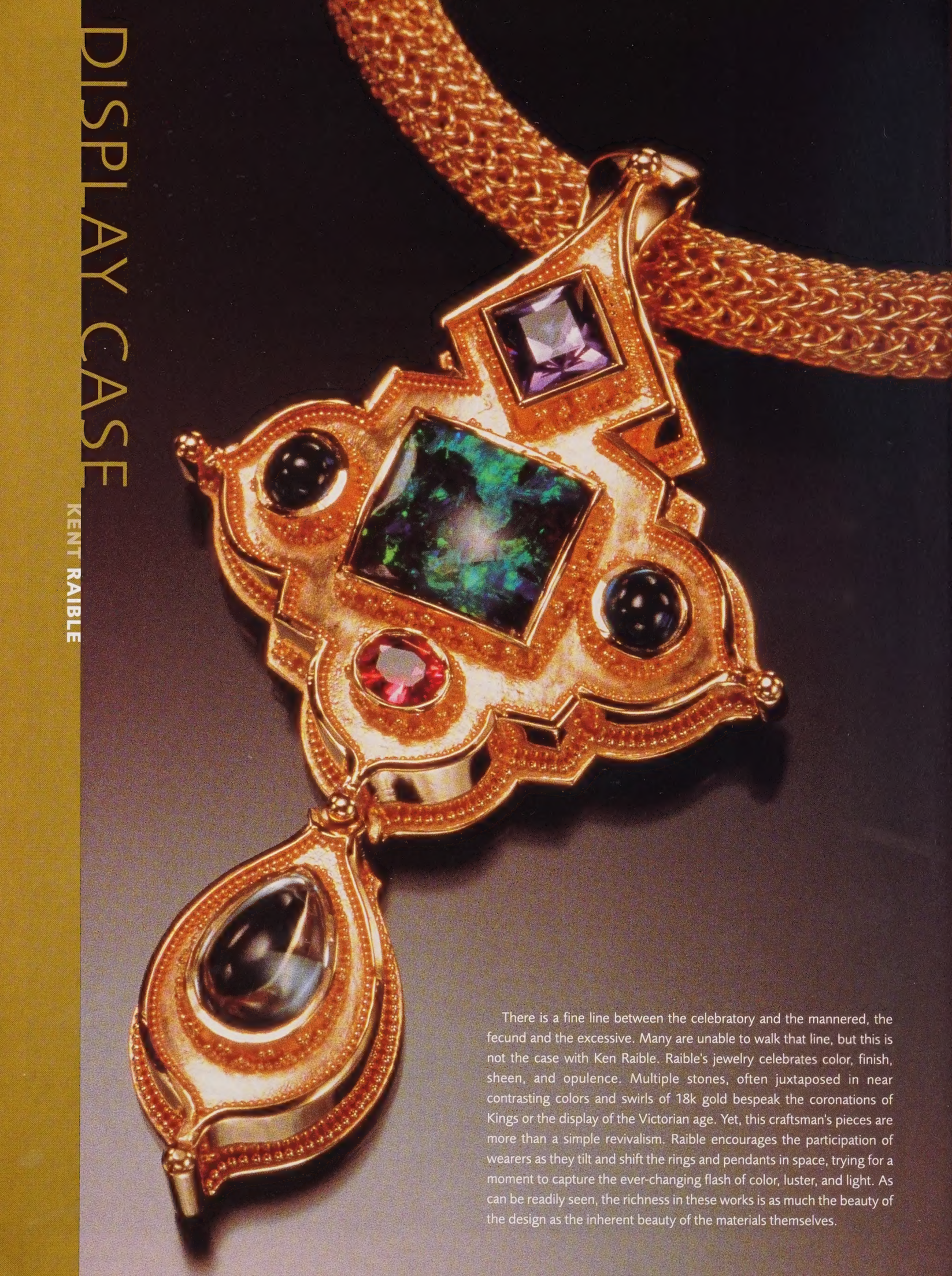


There is a fine line between the celebratory and the mannered, the fecund and the excessive. Many are unable to walk that line, but this is not the case with Ken Raible. Raible's jewelry celebrates color, finish, sheen, and opulence. Multiple stones, often juxtaposed in near contrasting colors and swirls of 18k gold bespeak the coronations of Kings or the display of the Victorian age. Yet, this craftsman's pieces are more than a simple revivalism. Raible encourages the participation of wearers as they tilt and shift the rings and pendants in space, trying for a moment to capture the ever-changing flash of color, luster, and light. As can be readily seen, the richness in these works is as much the beauty of the design as the inherent beauty of the materials themselves.

facing page
Pendant
6.49ct Boulder Opal, Tanzanite 1.29ct, Indicolite Tourmaline, 1.46ct, Pink Sapphire .37ct, Aquamarine 3.29ct, 32.9gr 18k

top left
Holly Agate Temple Ring
4.34 ct Holly Agate, Ruby .59ct, 17.5 gr 18k

top right
Ring
Green Tourmaline 9.20ct, Sapphire Cabs 2.68ct 23.1 gr 18k

middle left
Orange Montana Sapphire Torus Ring' 2.58 ct (patented) cut by Glen Lehrer, 1.21ct Mandarin Garnet, .05ct Diamond, 13.0gr 18k

middle right
Pendant
Pink Sapphire .73ct, Blue-Green Tourmaline 3.61ct, Tanzanite 4.65ct, 22.4gr 18k

bottom left
Floating City #2 (from a series of four)
Garnet Bullet cab 2.36ct, Gold Sapphire .45ct, Blue-Green Tourmaline .23ct, Chrome Tourmaline .22ct, Light Blue Tourmaline .16ct, Diamonds .18ct, 3.1gr Platinum, 21.1gr 18k

bottom right
Pin/Pendant
Moonstone 1.01ct, Indicolite Tourmaline 1.81ct, Opal 1.32ct, Pink Sapphire .51ct, Opal (6x3mm) .42ct, 18.6gr 18k.
The pin opens by pulling down on the Pink Sapphire, there is a spring hidden behind the Indicolite

Sottae 97-5, 1997
18k, sterling, black coral
$5^{1}/_{2} \times 2 \times {}^{1}/_{2}$"

The Cultural Journey of Eun-Mee Chung

text by Robert Griffith

As the world, driven by technology, computers, the Internet, a single currency, etceteras, grows closer together it may be an appropriate time to acknowledge to those artists who celebrate their cultural heritage.

Born and raised in Korea, Eun-Mee Chung moved to the United States to study and later to settle into life in Washington, D.C. While in Washington, she purchased a townhouse, joined a church, and began to consider her life in the U.S. while becoming active as a lecturer and exhibitor. Her later return to Korea remains a salient factor in the role of both cultures in her work in the years to follow. Eun-Mee Chung's work, while reaching us with a commonality of imagery, lauds her Koreanness. In doing so, the work honors and contributes to the preservation of all cultural heritages.

The artist's role is one of interpreter, recognizing the value in a particular aspect of a culture which is worthy of examination. Eun-Mee Chung's imagery, although originating from a particular culture, offers a look at all peoples. Though it points to a certain injustice, it does so with exercised restraint.

The artist's role is one of interpreter.

Eun-Mee Chung's works were germinated in Korea where her formal training began. Her sensitivity to the injustice of her culture surfaced in the face of male dominance and certain restrictive traditions. The work, however reactionary, was, and is, respectful of all life. In fact, the imagery unites peoples through the employment of common images such as clouds, leaves, and animals. Engaging and accessible through these symbolic images, the pieces nonetheless remind us that what is immediately perceived is not the whole story.

One can be charmed by Chung's capacity to offer viewers a glimpse at her personal story and life in her Korea. This Korea is seen through the eyes and heart of a Korean once removed and now returned. Her Christian beliefs also play a role, following thirteen years of study and professional life in the U.S.

"It has recently begun to strike me how many of my pieces employ symbols from Korean culture. I am a firm believer in the power of images, which I think shape our attitudes and thoughts not just consciously, but also unconsciously. The most powerful symbols, it seems to me, are the unconscious ones — that is, the ones which we take for granted so much that they move us without our being aware of our being manipulated. Such images we learn in childhood, or perhaps even before we are self-aware. They represent, therefore, our cultural heritage in its most fundamental and undeniable form."[1]

Chung's work is poetic. There is a certain harmony in the juxtaposition of images, shapes, and color. In this respect, one may apply a formalist approach in evaluating this work. Every detail is arranged and attended to with the utmost care. Impeccable craftsmanship helps to establish a unity among disparate forms. A narrative develops. Each form becomes a phrase in this narration. The story is shaped by a certain "layering" of life experiences.

A cloud, a tree, a house. All of these images are used by Chung as symbols of a life. Chung's work exercises a selective process through an economy of elements. Within the construction of her jewelry are intricate interior spaces. One can imagine these as places of the heart. In fact, some are considered by the artist as "shelters" with male or female symbols.

Many references are made to Motherhood and nurturing. During her return to Korea, she discovered (or rediscovered) the *Sottae*. This totemic and symbolic sign is used in rural agrarian Korean communities in a reverence for the nurturing of the land. The *sottae* are stylized images such as birds. Chung has found in these symbols a source for larger scale works which may, in fact, have marked her turn to sculpture. The tradition of the *sottae* is also represented in her brooches. In these the sottae have been represented in a somewhat more formal format. In *(Sottae) brooch 97-9*, the traditional bird is perched upon a sculptural looking form. In *(Sottae) brooch 97-11*, there is even a gear-like image. One may wonder if these works may have been transitional as the artist pondered her American and Korean influences and roots.

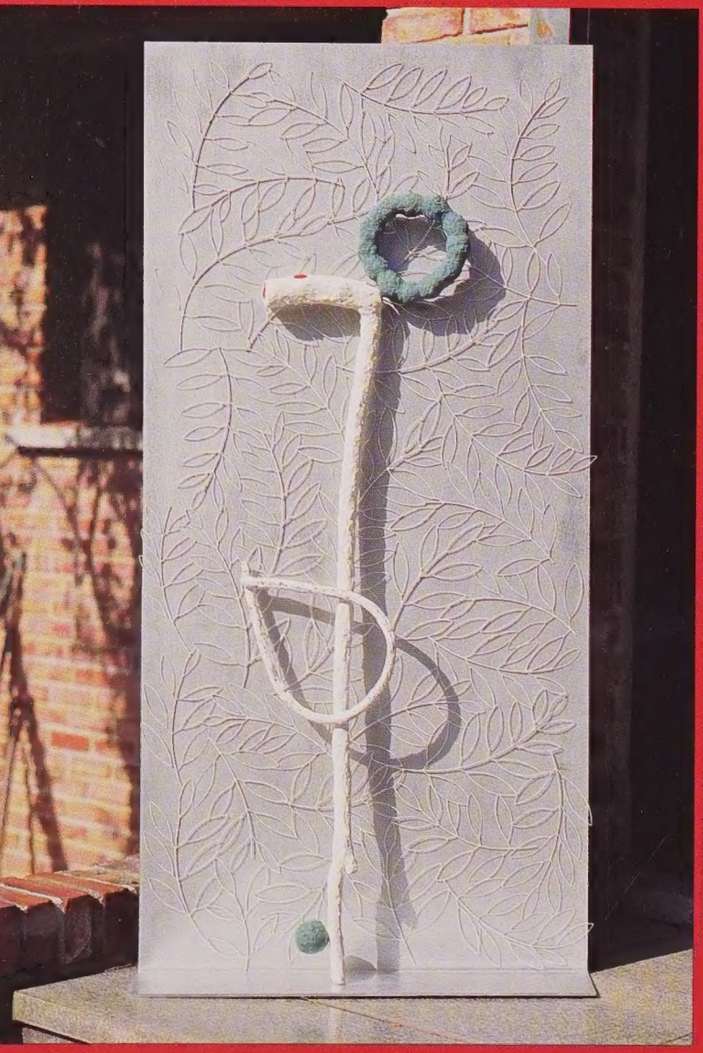
Male images are represented by peppers, which have been traditionally used in Korean culture. Chung makes a case for the male dominant side of society in Ecstasy with its cage-like form with hands inside reaching out as peppers lie about the base.

"With its distinctively phallic shape, peppers are associated with masculinity in Korea. For that reason, when a male child is born, strings of red peppers are hung about a family's doorway. The image of red pepper is so omnipresent in Korea that one, again, ceases to notice it. Here, too, it was not until I came to America and saw how little meaning red peppers had here that their cultural significance in Korea became clear to me."

The artist cites influences in the writings of Henrik Ibsen in *A Doll's House* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Chung makes a point of stressing that she is not promoting a feminist point of view but that she presents issues in a personal way, which provokes an awareness of a variety of injustices and intolerance. The work does, however, unmistakably champions causes for women while it celebrates grace and beauty.

"I myself did not think of the bojagi *(a traditional wrapping cloth used by women) as a symbol of women in*

Brooch, 1999
18k, sterling, diamond, cotton, coral
6 x 3 x 2"



Korea, until I came to America and noticed their absence here. It was my wondering why there were no bojagi in America and why their absence bothered me that led me to see the implicit values of womanhood that the bojagi had always had for me in Korea. In other words, my identification of the bojagi *as a symbol of womanhood really depended upon my being able to see it outside its context."*

The artist also makes use of architectural spaces which are occupied by elements such as ladders, fences, windows and furniture. In 1984, while living in Washington, Chung bought a house which became a great source for creative contemplation. She speaks of times when she felt like a voluntary slave in the house. She became more home and work oriented, at times feeling a sense of confinement and being "fenced in."

Ladders and steps appear, perhaps as a means of escape. Chung's spirituality plays a role as well. These ladders or stairs could be interpreted as a means of reaching upward to God. In the *Window* series, the imagery of clouds contributes to this notion. These clouds are also symbols with male and female characteristics. Some forms which resemble clouds are actually flowers. Some of these appear with spikes producing a warning to stay away.

"I myself did not think of the bojagi (a traditional wrapping cloth used by women) as a symbol of women in Korea, until I came to America and noticed their absence here..."

"The same is true of my use of the cloud motif. When I first started to use this motif, I chose it simply because I liked it, but now thinking about Korean culture, I realize how prevalent the cloud image is there. For instance, we recognize the following kinds of cloud motifs in Korea: the scattered cloud, the wave cloud, the ascending cloud, the wind cloud, the flying cloud, the thread cloud, the raised cloud, the cross-shaped cloud, the treasure cloud, and many more."

Life in Washington was a time of wondering and decision-making. Her thoughts focused on settling down. On trips to Korea, Chung went hiking and climbing in the mountains near Seoul. These treks provided the time and a much-needed environment for contemplation and reflection. She became more aware of familiar images of fences around houses. There were also discoveries regarding the *sottae* and the use of the bird image. Chung saw these as a "mother" image. After her years in the U.S., these images were seen with a fresh outlook and helped to fuel enthusiasm for a return to Korea.

"In Korea, birds are spirit messengers. They are also important in Korean shamanism; shamans often erecting a totem on poles called a sottae. The sight of these tall poles with their abstract bird shapes can be found all over Korea. I did not, however, know any of this when I made those pieces.

I am sure that I must have seen sottae *some time in my childhood, but it was not until I used the perched bird as a symbol for a waiting woman and then began to look for images of birds in Korea that I realized how many* sottae *were about me. I found them everywhere.*

The last decade, consequently, has seen me move from Korea to America and has seen my art change from works about the rejection of certain aspects of Korean life to a commitment to certain parts of American life. However, as I have made the commitment to America, I have been able to see more clearly the elements of my art."

Chung has created tableaux that resonate with storytelling. They embrace the practice and rhythm of a daily work routine which celebrates and honors domesticity by paying homage to routines of daily life in her country.

In a somewhat more two-dimensional work *Rhythm*, 1997, the artist has carefully arranged graphic symbols of *Dadeumi Bangmangi* which are wooden sticks resembling baseball bats that are used for beating clothes to wash them. In *Vestiges of Life*, *beoseon* (Korean traditional socks) are represented. In both wall pieces, the reoccurring shapes dance across the surface as if they are empowered and activated.

Other sculptures have aluminum backdrops with repetitive shapes that resemble leaves. Against these vertical backgrounds are *sottae*, as interpreted by the artist. *Prayer and Whispering*, 1997 illustrates the *sottae* with a steel form resembling an animal which is covered with a hardened mixture of ground cloth. To these objects is added selective elements of brilliant color. The artist employs a kind of formalism in the best sense of the word. The placement of these elements create a kind of punctuation or emphasis which bring the whole into a harmony that is both energized and, at the same time, at rest. These graphic symbols appear to be active, as the *sottae* (looking like a walking stick or cane) are passive and "rest in place" against the background. These works are somewhat theatrical as if a stage has been created and waits for the action to begin. The *sottae* is there to provide protection and assistance.

Although carefully arranged and meticulously assembled, these works have a casualness and

facing page: top left
Sottae 9901, 1999
18k, diamond, cotton
5 x 4/5 x 1/2"

top right
Brooch, 1999
24k, 18k, sterling, diamond, cotton
5 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 1 1/2"

bottom left
Prayer, 1997
acrylic paint, steel, wood, cotton, aluminum
62 x 30 x 6"

bottom right
Sottae 97-9, 1997
24k, sterling, black coral
6 x 25 x 1"

spontaneity that reaches a domestic side of viewers. The beaten cotton, applied wet over steel, creates rust on the surface. The artist has made no attempt to rework or cover the stains, allowing instinct to dictate an outcome.

This technique is neither contrived nor done simply for effect; it is Chung's presentation of what others may interpret as decay. In 1998, jewelry of the *Mountain Series* was exhibited at Roger Billcliffe Fine Art in Glasgow. These works juxtapose non-precious materials with gold and silver. Although not unique to Chung, the effect is striking and enhances the narrative quality of these pieces. In *Mountain-97-4*, the use of bark demonstrates the appropriateness of this material. As a natural material found in the mountains, it becomes a "souvenir." In addition, a spiraling shape arranged below the bark may be interpreted as a path up a mountain or a path in one's life.

Certain common objects are memorialized as the artist pays tribute to their significance.

From this same series *Downhill* also offers a sense of the journey to or from a summit. In this instance, however, Chung has added a staircase to assist the traveler. In these objects, we can imagine (as with the *sottae* sculptures) that the artist is offering assistance when needed.

In the works executed in Washington, the ladders and steps appear as if to provide a means of breaking out. But in the Korean works these elements are more contemplative. This effect may be the outcome of the artist's many trips to the mountains near Seoul which offered opportunities for meditation and decision-making.

In the bronze sculpture *Sottae II*, a ladder is arranged spontaneously as a means of reaching the somewhat precariously perched bird symbol (as used in traditional *sottae*). One wonders what may be obtained by reaching the symbol. Perhaps it is the attainment of the world of the Shaman and the understanding of some meaning or arriving at some conclusion.

This aspect appears to exist as a thread in all the works of Eun-Mee Chung. Strife, confinement, struggle, reaching out, and attainment, or, at least, the ability to attain. The artist indicates the path, provides the means, and celebrates the process.

Certain common objects are memorialized as the artist pays tribute to their significance. In *Yearning* 1997, Chung has carefully represented a tree branch as if "preserved" in bronze. It stands with a certain figurative presence, with an arm reaching up. It is active and empowered. Perhaps there is an element of spirituality here.

Chung's most recent works are colorful and employ organic shapes made from ground cloth. A wire matrix is created which allows her to attach diamonds or elements made of metal. One can recognize some of the earlier images which continue to be employed as formal elements.

Tuberous shapes appear which may reference things that come from the earth. There are also flower-like shapes at times incorporated with architectural references - fences, houses, etceteras. Diamonds are applied to these shapes. The disparate materials create curious associations. The sparkle of the diamonds emphasizes a feeling of uplift and are employed not for glitz, but rather as they may contribute to a newly found sense of contentment and confidence in the artist's life. They embellish the forms which (aside from their color) are of this earth. Though masterfully executed some of these forms leave us with the impression that they may be artifacts collected on a trip to the mountains or beach.

Chung's goal for the future is to reach a broader audience and to continue to touch on those common threads which run between cultures. Now residing and teaching in Korea, the artist continues to explore the human condition. Symbols of human emotions and existence continue to resonate in the work, which reflects a certain reticence and feeling of vulnerability. These common emotions are then tempered with Eun-Mee Chung's confidence and commitment to truth and understanding.

Chung's present work documents a process of inquiry manifested in a journey with no end. She shares both her curiosity and her insight. What remains is work which applauds the notion of cultural identity and preservation. ■

facing page: left
Yearning, 1997
bronze
36 x 8 x 2"

facing page: right
Sottae II (detail), 1997
bronze
34 x 8 x 4"

Robert Griffith is an artist and professor of art at Marywood University in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

[1] All quotes from the artist were originally presented at the Jewellers Exchange '96 - The International Dimension, a conference at the University of Northumbria, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. The author recognizes the courtesy extended for their inclusion in this article.

Figure 10
Close-Helmet for the Tilt:
Austria (Innsbruck); ca.
1580–1590
steel, leather, textile
weight 7 lb. 5 oz.

The Golden Age of Helmets

text by Lanie Lee

Wandering through the Metropolitan Museum in New York is always an adventure through time, and inevitably one stumbles across something that will capture the imagination. I never thought twice about armor, but a few years ago an armor exhibit there caught my eye. The workmanship and design of the objects marked a time when iron worked by hand was painstakingly developed into works of art. I found myself fascinated with these medieval "sculptures." Looking around I was overwhelmed with the many forms and designs that are still used today.

Armor, and articles made to protect the body, have been in existence since the beginning of humankind. As weapons were developed so was the technology of armor manufacturing (reaching its highest point from the late Middle Ages into the Renaissance). Some of the earliest examples of armor are copper helmets found at Ur in Sumeria, dating to around 2600 B.C.E. In ancient times, people used whatever materials were available to them in their environment. During the Stone Age, thick fur hides and wood were used. In Egypt some armor was made from crocodile skin; in Borneo from bark covered with fish scales; and in the Pacific Islands helmets were made from porcupine fish skin. Iron was mined by many different cultures and used to make weapons, utensils, and armor. During the Middle Ages, the most important mining areas were in northern Italy (Milan and Brescia), southern Germany (Augsburg, Nuremberg, Passau, and Landshut), Innsbruck, and the north of Spain.

Some of the earliest examples of armor are copper helmets found at Ur in Sumeria, dating to around 2600 B.C.E.

Before the fifteenth century, one of the methods used to extract iron was to build a furnace made of fired clay, fill it with alternate layers of iron-ore and charcoal, and then heat it to a very high temperature, using a pair of bellows to constantly fan the flames. The slag flowing out at the bottom left behind a porous lump of soft iron, which was then hammered. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the iron industry was revolutionized when water power was used to drive the bellows. This made iron smelting more economical and allowed the iron to flow out in a liquid state instead of remaining in the furnace as a lump. The liquid would harden quickly and crack if hammered. But after it was resmelted the iron became pure and malleable throughout.

The armorer forged iron into objects. To construct a helmet, the armorer would hammer a single billet into a plate and forge the bowl shape. Next, the sides were constructed, the cranium developed, cheekplates and the visor fitted (if needed), and then the helmet was completed by filing, polishing, piercing, engraving, etching, painting, or applying other decorative elements. Armorers were highly regarded and carefully guarded their processes (just the right percentage of carbon and iron could produce some of the hardest and most durable steel). Marriage between families of armorers was arranged so that the skills of the trade could be handed down from one generation to another.

Armor is usually classified into three main categories: quilted armor made from leather and/or fabric; mail armor made from interwoven rings of iron and steel; and plate armor made from rigid metal and held together with rivets. Most armor was padded with fabrics inside to absorb the shock of hard blows. Heavy armor was able to withstand the impact of a crossbow and the shock of a bullet, but eventually it proved no match against the advancing technology of firearms. Infantrymen also found armor too cumbersome, and around the time of the American Revolution armor had almost completely disappeared.

Aside from its permanent armor exhibit, the Metropolitan Museum currently has an exhibition of European helmets dating from 1450–1650, selected from their Reserve Collection. Many of the helmets have never been displayed before. The exhibition gives a sampling of the various styles of helmets from different countries and shows the evolution of European helmet design over two centuries.

Some of the dominant helmet styles during the Middle Ages and Renaissance were the sallet, an armet or close helmet, the burgonet, and the morion. The sallet is an open-faced helmet with a wide brim at the back; it leaves the lower face and neck exposed. An armet completely covers the head; it was usually worn with a wrapper that covered the lower face and neck. The burgonet is usually a light, open helmet with a projecting peak; some were also made as close helmets. The morion is

lighter in weight and usually has a tall almond-shaped bowl and a short brim.

The Spanish War Hat (figure 1) is a large deep helmet with a basic bowl form that is similar to combat helmets used during the twentieth century. The rivet holes (which are now filled in) along the base of the bowl and the brim probably held decorative bands of gilt copper.

Constructed in several pieces (the bowl, cheekpieces, and visor), the armet usually had a wrapper, which covered the lower face and neck to give the visor added protection. Mounted knights in fifteenth-century Italy usually wore armets. At one time it was common practice for a knight or warrior to have his helmet buried with him as a tribute. Many of these burial helmets were made from old, reused parts, such as the Italian armet (figure 2). It has a mix of old and new elements: the rondel is new; the visor and bevor are designs from other helmets.

Knights participating in tournaments needed helmets with large visors and enough openings to provide adequate viewing and ventilation, such as the Anglo-Flemish tournament helmet shown (figure 3). To secure the helmet, it would be bolted down to the breast- and backplate. In Germany, helmets with humorous masks (see figure 4) were worn at mock tournaments during festival celebrations. The mask would be forged from the visor section. This mask is an extraordinary example of the artistic and technical skills of an armorer. The angular shape of the face and the clean lines of the facial features create an amusing mocking expression.

Italian armorers were noted for helmets embossed in high relief of fantastic creatures (figure 5); this helmet was forged from a single plate of steel. To produce the fine details of the beast's scales, comb, and menacing expression, the helmet required quite a bit of hammering. The constant hammering and chiseling in the embossing technique severely weakened the steel, and, therefore the piece was used mainly for ceremonial purposes.

A guard's helmet would have a coat of arms for both decoration and identification. The Italian helmet for the guard of Pope Julius III, (figure 6), shows the etched profile of the pope on a blue colored ground. (Etching was invented for decorating armors long before it was used in printing.) The etching process began by covering the surface of a plate with wax and then scratching out a design or drawing. Application of a mild acid would eat away at the exposed metal surfaces, leaving recessed lines. Once etched, the helmet shown was gilded by coating the surface with an amalgam of mercury and powdered gold; the surface was then heated, which would evaporate the mercury and leave the gold adhered to the metal.

Once etched, the helmet shown was gilded by coating the surface with an amalgam of mercury and powdered gold; the surface was then heated, which would evaporate the mercury and leave the gold adhered to the metal.

By the late-1500s, embossed helmets were more narrative and the surfaces much flatter. An Italian infantryman's embossed pointed morion (figure 7) has a detailed scene of a Roman hero with his hand in a fire, standing before King Porsena. Gold damascening was used to decorate the figures. Damascening, also known as inlaying, is a technique that originated in the Near East. After a design was engraved into the iron, gold or silver threads were burnished into the engraved lines until the surface was flush.

The German burgonet (figure 8) was influenced by Turkish helmets. In the mid-1500s, Turkish tournaments and parades were held in Vienna and Prague. The mosquelike shaped helmet has a fluted bowl and the surface was etched and gilt with Near Eastern designs. It is missing cheekpieces, a peak with sliding nasal, and some neck plates. Fluting was used as an ornamental design in armors of the early sixteenth century, but it was also very practical. Fluting gave the armor a glancing surface and increased its strength and rigidity without adding extra weight.

top left
Figure 1
War Hat: Spain; late 15th century
steel, copper, textile
weight 3 lb. 12 oz.

top right
Figure 2
Armet: Italy (Milan); ca. 1490 and later additions
steel, brass
weight 6 lb. 7 oz.

middle left
Figure 3
Tournament Helmet; Anglo-Flemish; ca. 1510–1520
steel
weight 10 lb. 5 oz.

middle right
Figure 4
Armet: Germany (Nuremberg) or Austrian (Innsbruck); ca. 1520–1525
steel
weight 7 lb. 2 oz.

bottom left
Figure 5
Burgonet all'Antica: Italy (Milan); ca. 1535–1540
steel, gold, silver
weight 3 lb. 12 oz.

bottom right
Figure 6
Burgonet of the Guard of Pope Julius III: Italy (Brescia); ca. 1550–1555
steel, gold, brass
weight 3 lb. 14 oz.

top left
Figure 7
Pointed Morion: Italy (Milan); ca. 1560–1570
steel, gold, silver
weight 2 lb. 15 oz.

top right
Figure 8
Burgonet in Oriental Style: Germany (Nuremberg?); ca. 1560
steel, gold, brass
weight 2 lb.

middle left
Figure 9
Comb Morion: Germany (Brunswick?); ca. 1560–1565
steel
weight 4 lb. 8 oz.

middle right
Figure 11
Closed Burgonet of "Savoyard" Type: Italy; ca. 1600–1620
steel
weight 10 lb. 1 oz.

bottom left
Figure 12
Closed Burgonet: Netherlands; ca. 1620–1630
steel, gold, brass
weight 5 lb. 5 oz.

bottom right
Figure 14
Spider Helmet: England or France; ca. 1650–1700
steel, paint, textile
weight 4 lb. 11 oz.

Figure 13
Siege Helmet: France; ca. 1600–1650
steel
weight 20 lb. 9 oz.

Northern German armorers were noted for helmets decoratively etched with historical figures drawn in fine detail, such as the comb morion (figure 9). This morion was made with a two-part construction, in which the two halves are joined along the edge of the comb. The traditional arms of the painter's guild is on the comb, indicating that this helmet was considered an etcher's masterpiece.

Helmets used for tilts usually had a large ventilation door on the right side of the upper bevor and extra reinforcement on the left side, which was exposed to the lance (figure 10). Inside this Austrian helmet are leather strappings strategically positioned to act as shock absorbents.

The closed burgonet (figure 11) is unusual because of its fully embossed nose. When the Swiss captured the troops of the duke of Savoy, they retrieved many of these helmets and referred to them as "Savoyards." This robotic looking helmet is quite heavy and was worn by a cavalryman. In battle it was important to bring fear to the enemy in any way possible. Germans referred to this helmet as "a death's head."

The Dutch helmet (figure 12) has a face defense made from vertical bars. If the visor and neck plate were removed, the design appears similar to a football helmet.

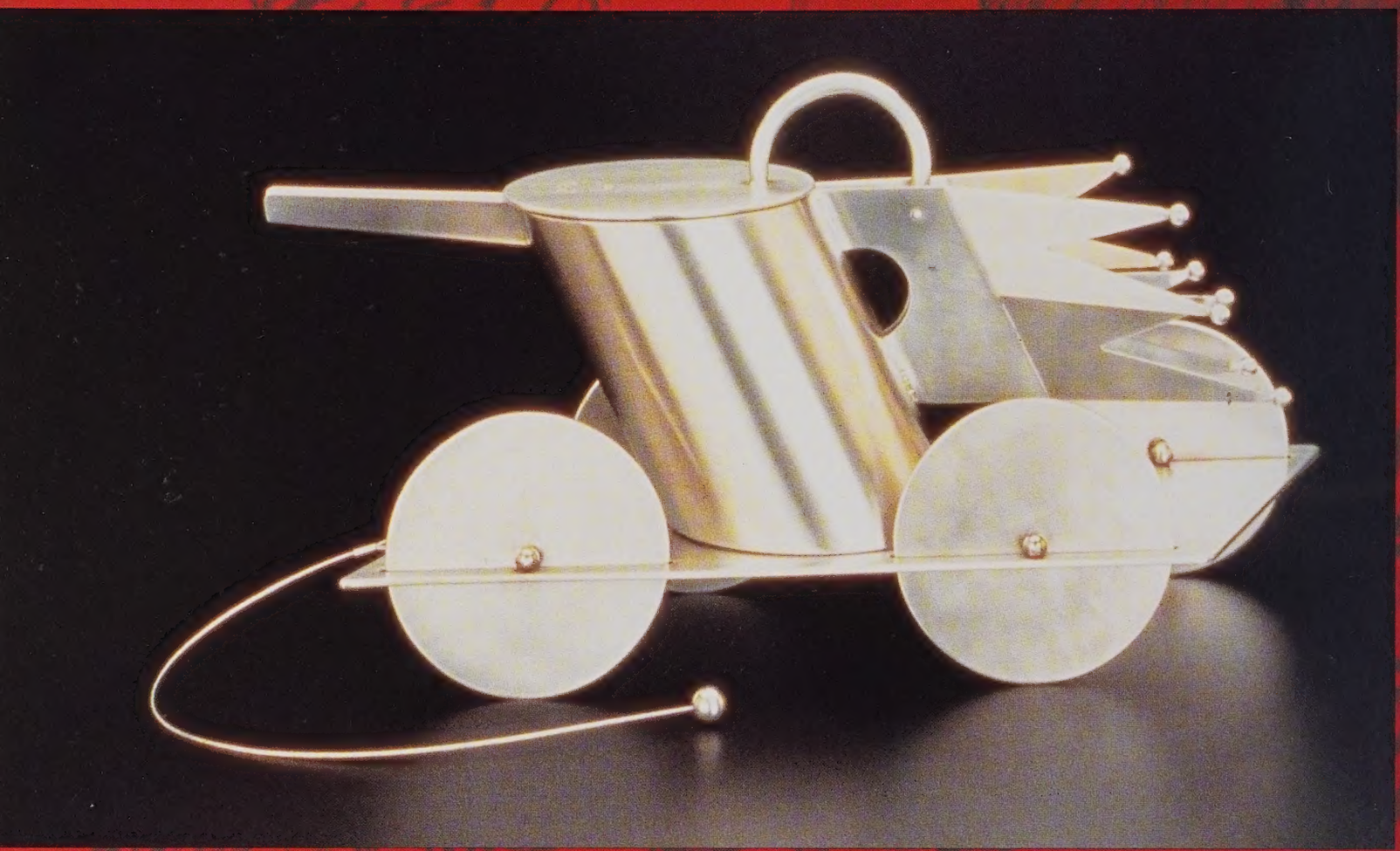
Siege helmets were made to withstand close-range fire. The French siege helmet (figure 13) is reinforced with a double thickness of plates on the bowl and cheeks, and weighs over twenty pounds.

As the helmet evolved there were many unique and bizarre designs. The spider helmet (figure 14) is quite unusual. Historians are not sure if the English or French should be credited for this creation. Hanging bars, which are tucked under the disk at the apex, unfold and dangle around the rim of the helmet, protecting a soldier from the blows from a sword.

By the eighteenth century, armor could no longer compete with firearms and it was thus practically obsolete. It was not until World War I that the steel helmet again became standard equipment for the soldier. The helmet designs from centuries ago have inspired designers and artists today. Bicycle, football, and roller-blading helmets are made from lightweight synthetic materials, but their shapes are a part of the medieval past. Technology has replaced the skills of blacksmiths, goldsmiths, etchers, and armorers, but the quality can never be duplicated. ■

Lanie Lee is a writer and editor. She lives in New York City.

Credit: Reproductions of helmets courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All reproductions are from the exhibition: "European Helmets, 1450–1650: Treasures from the Reserve Collection" (January 25, 2000 to January 2001).



top
Fast Lane Teapot, 1998
tig-welded. cold-forged, lathe turned, milled, stainless steel
$18\frac{3}{4} \times 7"$
Photograph by Michael Mau

bottom
Times Square Ball, 1999
tig-welded. cold-forged, lathe turned, milled, stainless steel
$11\frac{3}{4} \times 6 \times 9"$
Photograph by Michael Mau

The Fortuitous Encounters of David Damkoehler

text by Frank C. Lewis

On first meeting David Damkoehler strikes one as a somewhat eccentric gentleman scholar. In conversation his quiet and civil tone and his well-read and wide-ranging erudition, appear as much eighteenth century as post modern, but his eclectic interests, frequently changing but always cutting edge eyeglasses and ear posts, and his passionate concern with contemporary design and its relation to daily life quickly disabuses one of any notion that the craftsman inhabits the ivory tower of pure theory or the rarefied workshop of a dilettantish tinkerer.

Damkoehler, a professor in the department of art at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay, is passionately involved in the practice of craft. He adamantly insists on the value of careful handwork and precision and resolutely affirms the necessity for skill, patience, a love of texture, the heft of materials, and a sensitivity to both the feel and look of metal objects. Though over the years he has painted, sculpted, and produced and taken part in numerous performance art events, for the past seven years he has almost solely dedicated his time, outside of the classroom, to renovating a ninety-year old bank building and producing jewelry and, more recently, teapots and tea caddys.

His living space flows imperceptibly into his studio. His two industrial machinists lathes at first seem to be simply more of the many curious and visually complex objects among his collection of nineteenth and twentieth century ephemera, a collection which ranges from a gigantic fiberglass "Big Boy" holding aloft a three-foot-diameter burger, to a defused naval bombshell, to numerous leatherette and wooden cases of late 19th century electrostatic quack medical devices. But for Damkoehler these objects are not simply an accumulation of the detritus of modern society. Each object serves as an essay on form and function. This *wunderkammer* also serves as a constant source of inspiration and reverie. The craftsman is constantly and actively engaged with the look, feel, and intended use of things produced by modern industry. Sensitive to the role of objects in society and interested in objects as coded symbols of consumption, of the optimism offered by scientific cures and "labor saving" designs, or of taste and fashion, Damkoehler is engaged in a verbal, visual, and tactile dialogue with "stuff," and he is always aware of the implications that this dialogue has on present day making.

Damkoehler is engaged in a verbal, visual, and tactile dialogue with "stuff," and he is always aware of the implications that this dialogue has on present day making.

The craftsman interrogates the way that shapes, textures, and materials serve as signs (in the linguistic sense) of speed, science, consumerism, and aesthetic play, among others. Looking carefully at Damkoehler's work viewers will discover a slipping of the meanings and contexts of such signs. An earring recalls a part for a vintage motorcycle, the wheels of a recent tea caddy are influenced by the steering wheel of a Citröen DS (a futuristic French-made automobile), a bracelet looks like an ersatz turn-of-the-century device for curing arthritis. This mixing and collision of contexts and associations is the site where the artist locates the creative process. He freely acknowledges an indebtedness to the Surrealists and their familiar mantra taken from Isidore Ducasse (the Comte de Lautréamont): "As beautiful as an umbrella and a sewing machine lying together on a dissecting table." Yet at the same time Damkoehler exhibits, through his consummate practice of craft and the unity created by the primary use of a single material (Austinitic stainless steel), a more technically refined approach than that practiced by Surrealism.

Starting in 1993 a group of pieces were based on the artist's memory of junior high school formal dance corsages. Memory, of course, plays tricks and many of the brooches seem oversized and commanding. They nonetheless marry a precision of edge with a bountiful evanescent spray of spiraling rod and mobius-like turns. They too, maintain something of the awkwardness of the original floral arrangements which always rested rather uncomfortably on adolescent shoulders and lapels. At the same time Damkoehler's corsages are not simply '60s floral excess translated into surgical stainless steel. Arching cable, polished bearings, and hand forged ribbons of stainless, some which still bear the marks of their original function as machinists rulers, maintain their particular aesthetic. Never belying the industrial and medical associations of hardness, control, and restriction, an aspect that Damkoehler calls "the meanness" of the material, the surgical stainless steel nevertheless embraces, wraps, and flows with a kind of tensely quivering energy and abandon.

A related group of brooches move over and around the shoulder and lapel, ornamenting both the wearer's front and the back. These lavaliere brooches were inspired by a number of cultural artifacts: policemen's walkie talkies, which run from the belt to over the shoulder finally to rest on the lapel; the lavaliere microphone which was developed in the golden age of television; the lavaliere itself, an eighteenth century item of jewelry which hung on a fine chain; and finally by the artist's mother, who as an artist, herself, used to wear brooches on the back of her clothing. Thus the practical and quite specific functions of industrial objects and historical antecedents, become as much an inspiration as a long past memory and a contemporary leap of associations.

Wedded to both craft and design Damkoehler's works bespeak an obsessive patience and fascinating consideration of their most subtle movements and rhythms. Many of the clasps and pinbacks are hidden, absorbed by the design of shape and line, lost in the overall unity of a piece, yet once found they are sure and precise. For *Kiddish Cup, 2000*, Damkoehler unwrapped industrial stainless steel cable and then rewrapped it using seven strands rather than the original six, seven being a mystical number in Judaism.

Such attention to detail is found in his brooches at the smallest level and is equally reflected in his treatment of larger forms and spaces. For the upper floor of his home/studio he cut and tig-welded metal industrial catwalk sections to create a seeming continuous network of diagonal grids, not only hiding the square, 4 x4 foot modular quality of the decking as received from the manufacturer but also unifying the upper floor with the diagonally accented spaces of the first floor space. The stainless steel stair railings and stiles were individually turned on his lathe, between commissions and speculative pieces. Unable to find the exact finish which he desired in his lavatory, Damkoehler purchased an industrial grade, stainless toilet made for prisons and hand prepared and polished every surface to match his vision of a room designed in its entirety for cleanliness and efficiency. Though more than willing to use the Thomas register to locate parts and fittings, Damkoehler frequently finds himself machining the smallest screws and fasteners from raw stainless because a commercially available screw or connection does not offer the precise proportions which he desires.

A sketchbook is never far from the craftsman's reach. Its pages are filled with quick sketches, sometimes little more than a few sweeping contours and scribbled shapes. Printed images of intriguing objects ripped from newspapers or magazines, and ranging from pieces sold at auction to advertisements for Swiss made toasters, are liberally inserted between drawings and cryptic notes. Drawing and image collecting is, for Damkoehler, an important element of creativity, the instant when the eye and the hand come together to fix the dynamic relationship between form, space, function, and sometimes dream. Some pieces come from drawings that are quite fully rendered, while others may reflect only a curve or formal relationship between two shapes found in the initial scratching of the pen. He also occasionally "draws" in three dimensions, picking a variety of parts off the bench to arrange and play with relationships. Sliding highly polished bearings along looped bands, or unwinding stainless cable to discover helical turns in space, the craftsman looks around his studio or flips through old sketchbooks to find the spark of inspiration.

Many of his pieces have a playful quality. Damkoehler himself has referred to them as "erector set toys." Yet each of these playful studies are thoughtful investigations into the rhythm of a particular movement, the smoothness of linkages, or the viability of a closure. Once on a bus trip to Chicago the craftsman handed me a child's red plastic lunch box which contained a jumbled and complex collection of bracelets, brooches, pins, and earpieces. For the entire two-hour trip, like a child I played and jiggled, twirled and spun the parts with a joyous sense of wonder and awe. The craftsman related my actions to the same sense of excitement he had when he purchased a bucket of old

this page
Kiddish Cup, 2000
tig-welded. cold-forged, lathe turned, milled, stainless steel
$3\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$"
Photograph by Michael Mau

facing page: top
Celestial Teacups with Wheeled Oval Serving Tray, 2000
tig-welded. cold-forged, lathe turned, milled, stainless steel
Photograph by Michael Mau

facing page: bottom
T1 (over the shoulder brooch), 1993
lathe-turned, cold-forged, stainless steel, silver
$14\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$" Base: $1\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{3}{4}$"
Photograph by Michael Mau
Collection of the American Crafts Museum

stainless steel medical instruments. At the same time Damkoehler engaged in a practical and theoretical debate on the role of design throughout history and in contemporary life. Exhibiting an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of Design, Damkoehler recalled books and articles read years ago, quoted freely and naturally from Ettienne Ledoux to Adolph Loos to Raymond Loewy to Alberto Alessi, and punctuated his points with thoughtful and intelligent observations.

Most importantly for the artist, the works evince a sense of delight and wonder at discovering the ever widening chain of associations between forms, materials, familiar images, and unexpected contexts.

His recent tig-welded, lathe-turned, and cold-forged stainless steel teapots evince an industrial monumentality, punctuated by playful spouts and handles, balls that travel on a cable path like the celestial models found in an astronomers classroom, and echoes of the streamlining found in everything from irons to pencil sharpeners to locomotives from the '20s and '30s. *Fast Lane Teapot* seems to lean into the wind, both comic and optimistic, like the 1920 Gunthermann *Golden Arrow*, a tinplate toy which was its inspiration. The hinge on this teapot is like an automobile door hinge turned inside out, creating a dramatic arc which pivots from a ball between the flaring banners to the center of the cover.

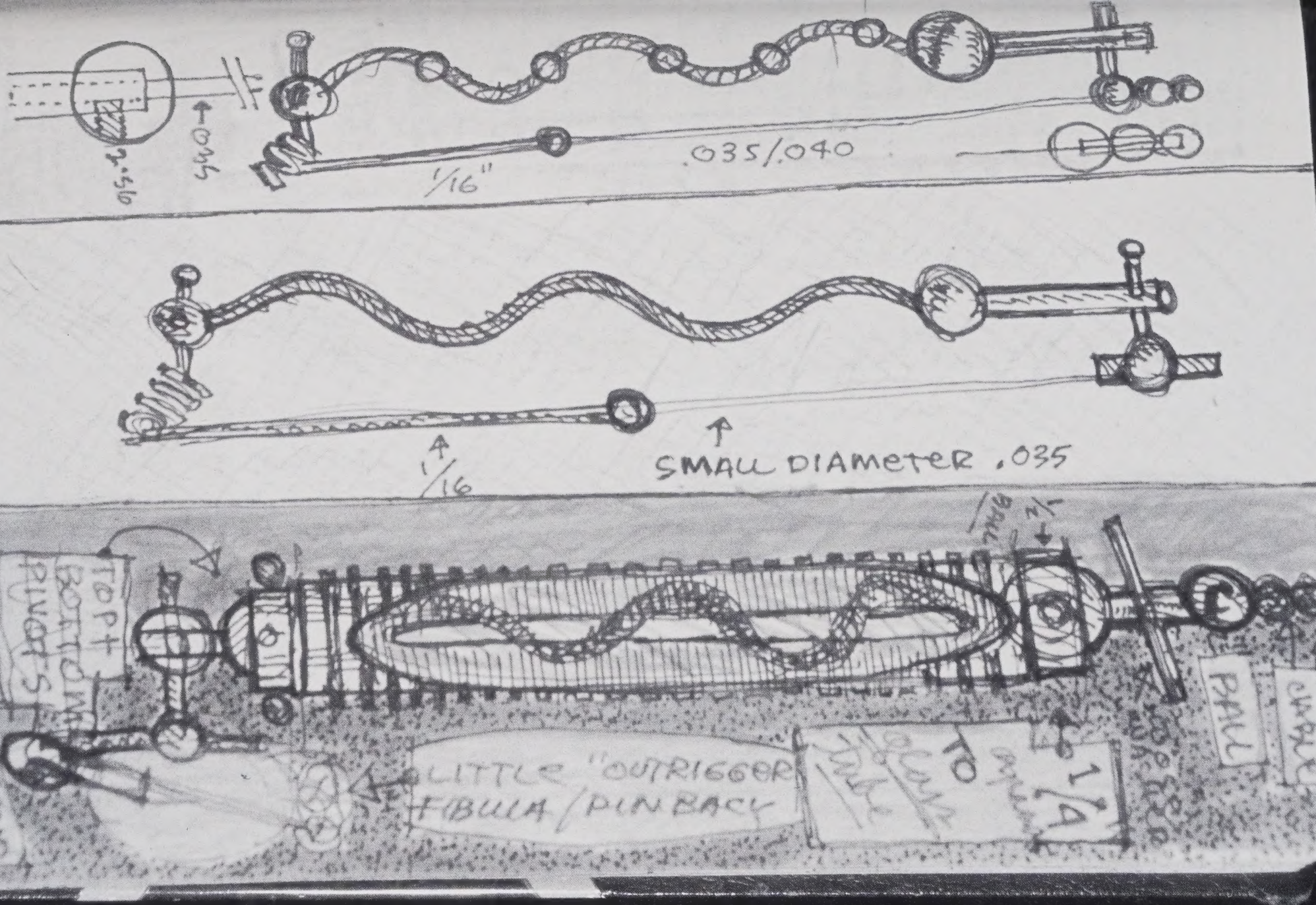
Times Square Ball, 1999 not only plays on language with its punning reference to the question of "How does one square the circle," an intellectual problem which fascinated enlightenment poets and mathematicians alike, but it recalls storage tanks, laboratory retorts, and distilling vats, and of course, the familiar associations with the dropping ball on Broadway every New Year.

Celestial Teacups with Wheeled Oval Serving Tray, 2000, combines influences from the previously mentioned Citroen with the magical quality of Cinderella's coach. The strong material allows for a spindly openness, with single spoked wheels and seemingly precarious stems which hold the teacups aloft. Sitting at rakish angles the cups bespeak the whirling mayhem of cartoon characters married to a machined though playful modernity. Rolling smoothly along a tabletop, the caddy delivers goods with efficiency and wit.

For Damkoehler design marries not only form and function but physical engagement and a sense of play. Most importantly for the artist, the works evince a sense of delight and wonder at discovering the ever-widening chain of associations between forms, materials, familiar images, and unexpected contexts. ■

Frank C. Lewis is the present editor of *Metalsmith* magazine. He has recently been named the Director of the Wriston Gallery of Art and Curator of Collections, at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin.

facing page
Sketchbook Pages, 1996-99
pencil, ink, marker, collage, paper, mixed media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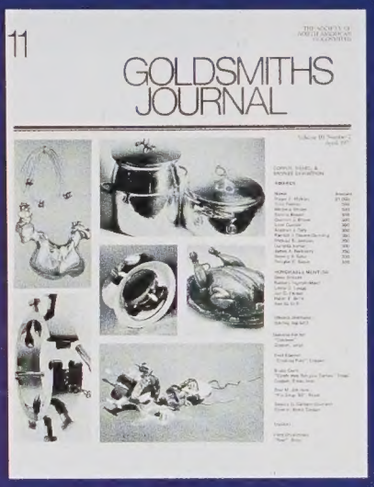

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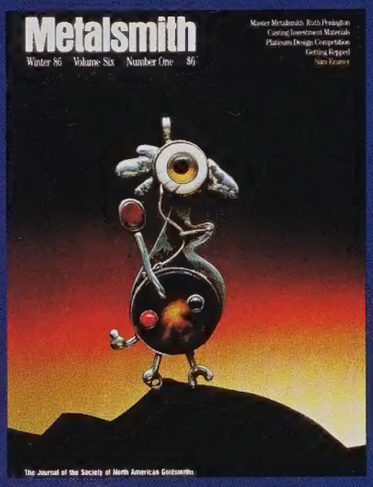

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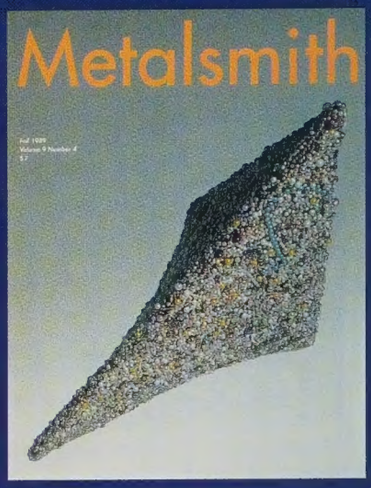

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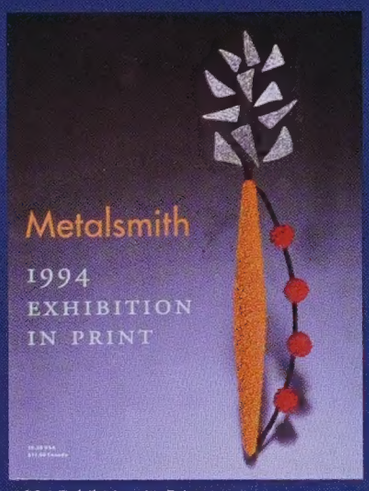

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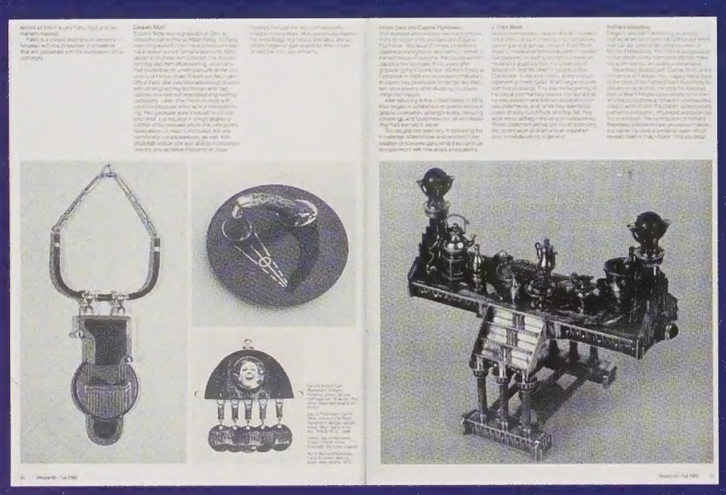

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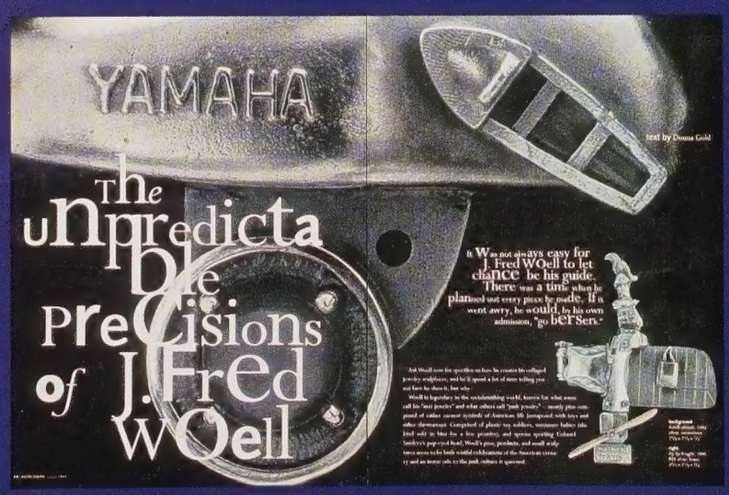

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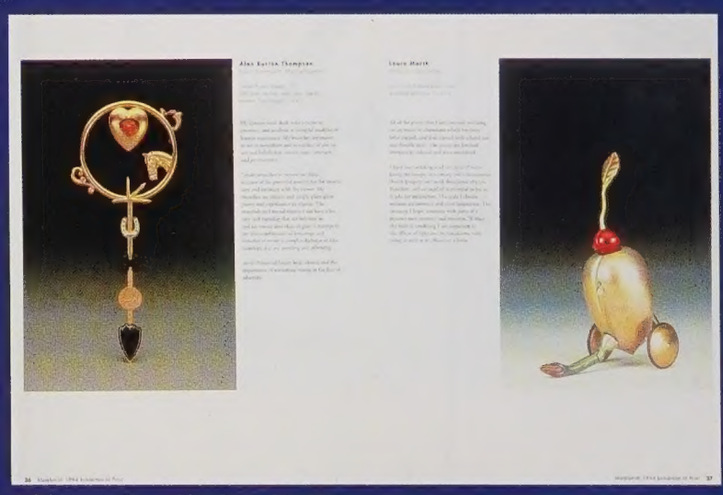

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Volume 1 #1

Metalsmith Twentieth Anniversary

text by Bruce Metcalf, Contributing Editor

The first issue of *Metalsmith* was published twenty years ago, in the fall of 1980. *Brooch with Stand Number 1* by Hiroko Sato Pijanowski graced the cover. Inside, there was "A Decade of Metalsmithing in the United States: 1970 - 1980" by Robert Cardinale, articles on René Lalique and Georg Jensen, and reviews of exhibitions by Douglas Steakley, Jamie Bennett, and Helen Shirk. To give a little sense of historical context, there were advertisements for the Boston University Program in Artisanry, Artwear, Greenwood Gallery, and the CARE Fund for Cambodians.

Actually, SNAG got into the publishing business in 1975. SNAG was only five years old, but the need for a means of communication was obvious. At the time, *Craft Horizons*, the standard craft magazine of the time, gave only modest coverage to studio jewelry and metalsmithing, and it was clear that no commercial magazine could adequately represent the field. Fortunately, a jewelry teacher in Virginia named Mark Baldridge volunteered his services, and the first issue of *The Society of North American Goldsmiths Newsletter* appeared in August. It was three sheets of paper stapled on the short edge, printed at Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia. The first *Newsletter* was a one-man show: Baldridge did everything. It was his perseverance that made the present magazine possible.

By April 1976, the publication was retitled *Golddust*. The issue was the first to be folded and stapled, and the first to have photographs. By April 1977, it morphed into *Goldsmiths Journal*, a twenty-four page magazine printed on glossy paper. This magazine continued to expand through 1980, by which time it was forty-eight pages long - all produced on a volunteer basis by Mark Baldridge.

SNAG had grown to about 1500 members by this time, and was offering an expanded menu of services. The consensus was to upgrade SNAG's flagship publication by hiring an editor for a new magazine, and simultaneously reviving the newsletter. The idea was that events listings, news, organization business and such would appear in the SNAG Newsletter, while feature articles, artist profiles and reviews would appear in the magazine. The new magazine - the present *Metalsmith* - was conceived as a public representative and showcase for the field. It was to be something of a hybrid publication. While it would occasionally print how-to instructions and technical research, this kind of information would not dominate. At the same time, *Metalsmith* would not be exactly like an art magazine, either. There would be space for letters to the editor, technical information, reports about schools and student work, and articles about the jewelry marketplace. And so *Metalsmith* was born, with Sarah Bodine as the first editor.

The new magazine - the present *Metalsmith* - was conceived as a public representative and showcase for the field.

Metalsmith is published by a medium-based craft organization, and inevitably the disputes inside SNAG shape the magazine. Like most of the craft societies, there is a tension between those who market their work for a living and those who do not; between conservatives and radicals; between teachers and businessperson. In Fall 1989, the memorable cover showed a brooch coated with fake pearls by "East Village artist" Arch Connelly. The next month, a distressed subscriber wrote that "...when metal becomes completely obscured and is not even included for structural purposes, I am depressed." She continued, "Why retain the name *Metalsmith*?"

Why, indeed? The "metal" in *Metalsmith*, like the "gold" in goldsmith, is actually an indicator of a larger body of makers and materials, not a strict limitation. In fact, one of the purposes of this magazine is to report the changing nature of contemporary jewelry and metalworking. The fields that *Metalsmith* covers, from studio jewelry-making and smithing to enameling and ironwork, are not

static and unchanging enterprises. Even though John Ruskin and William Morris imagined that the revival of craft would have a distinctly medieval character, craft in North America is a distinctly modern phenomenon. It is linked to traditional hand technologies on one side and the inventiveness of twentieth-century art on the other. Even though the two characteristics might seem antithetical, *Metalsmith* has always sought to cover the whole spectrum. One could say that the editor's job is a balancing act. The traditional end of the scale can be located in the generation of jewelers and smiths who were profoundly influenced by Scandinavian modern. And so, early pioneers like Ronald Pearson, Margaret Craver, Sam Kramer and Alma Eikerman have been featured in these pages. Correspondingly, the craft's avant-garde has also seen its fair share of ink: Marjorie Shick, the "New Jewelry" movement, Harriette Estel Berman, and Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, among many others.

Another purpose of *Metalsmith* is to encourage critical thinking about the field. From Michael Dunas in the 1970's to Tacey Rosolowski in recent issues, a number of writers have tried to enlarge the frame of reference applied to jewelry and metalwork. This project has not been without its confrontations, and some metalsmiths have responded with a determined anti-intellectualism. And yet, a field's maturity might be measurable in terms of its ability to tolerate competing points of view, even contentious arguments, and *Metalsmith* has presented a wide range of voices and theoretical approaches.

Since 1994, *Metalsmith* has also published an annual *Exhibition-in-Print*, intended to provide a timely pictorial document of the field. The *EiP* alternates between competitive and curated issues, and has lately become international in scope.

Looking back, the Editors have done a pretty good job. Sarah Bodine, Virginia Croft, and Frank Lewis have all had their turn at the helm, and the magazine will welcome its fourth editor shortly. In twenty years, more than 400 craftspeople have been featured in reviews and articles. Because of its diversity of coverage and opinion, *Metalsmith* has grown into the document of record for the whole field in Canada and the U.S. Not bad for a publication that began at three pages, twenty-five years ago. ■

Bruce Metcalf is a Contributing Editor for *Metalsmith* magazine. He is also a jeweler who lives and works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

OBSERVATIONS

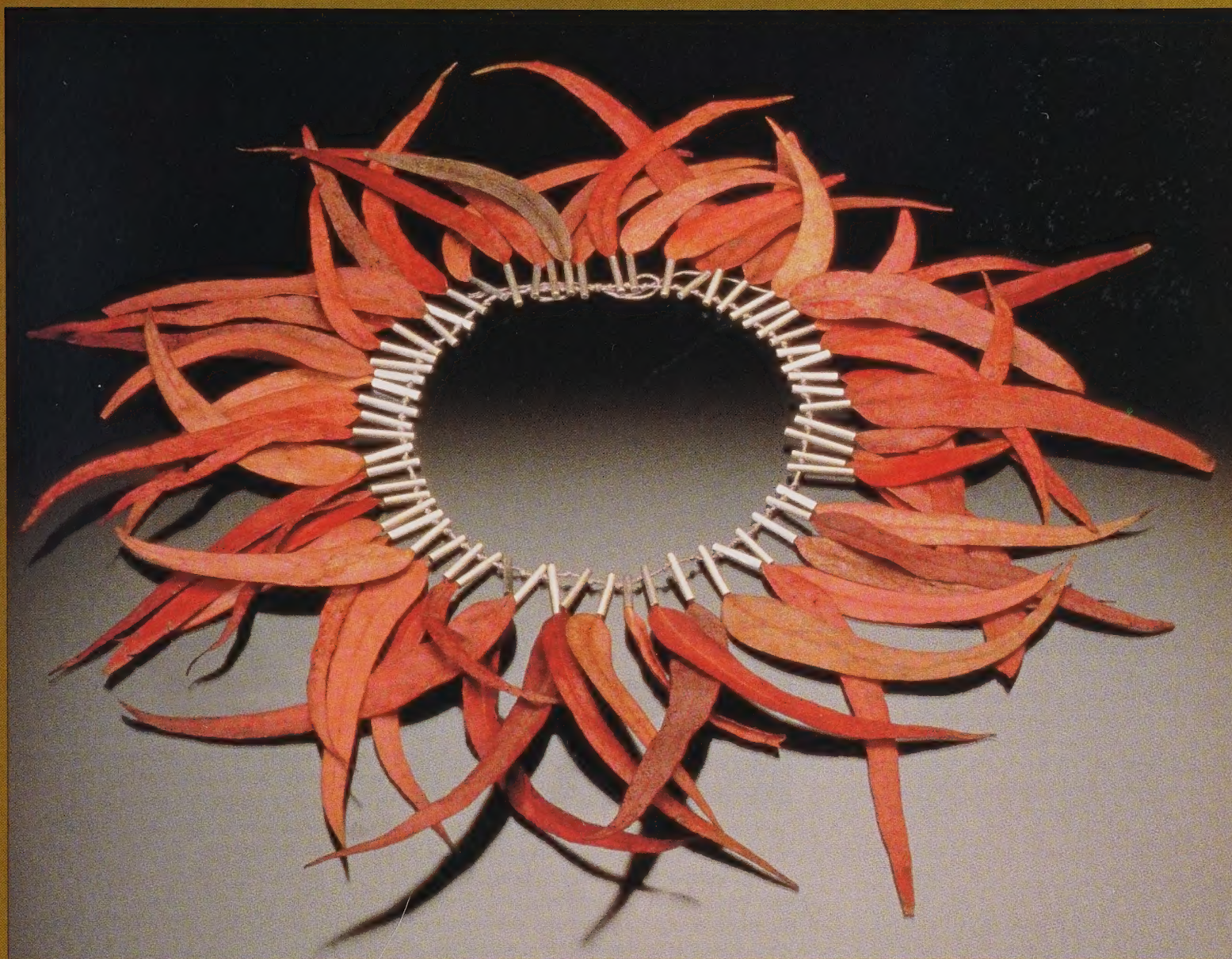
the work of SARAH HOOD

text by Michal Ann Carley

above
Malden Avenue East from Structural Series #1: Decomposition, 1999
sterling silver, Chinese Lantern pods
8 x 8 x 1"

facing page: top
Big Sur from Structural Series #1: Decomposition, 1999
sterling silver, Eucalyptus leaves, linen
14 x 14 x 1/2"

Facing page: bottom
Arboretum from Structural Series #1: Decomposition, 1999
sterling silver, Magnolia leaves, linen
16 x 16 x 1/2"



A simple jointed wrap follows a cadence of hollows in one's neck. Three golden laurel leaves, slightly parted as if gasping for breath, branch off a ring to mark the wearer's clavicle. This is the lyricism of Sara Hood's jewelry. Obtusely influenced by French literary theory, Hood essentializes natural forms and distills their component shapes and hues almost into rhetorical devices, capable of suggestion without being explicit. *Structural Series: Deconstruction* for Hood reveals a process and a coming into being, not one that is fixed, but unfixed.

The affectation of impermanence and fragility is stressed to its limits in *Structural Series #1: Decomposition*. Necklaces of sterling silver spokes and Chinese Lanterns, fragrant Eucalyptus, or Magnolia leaves fan around the wearer's neck in a celebratory arbor. These necklaces evoke a sense of ritual, reminiscent of the pectoral wreaths of raffia or feathers worn in the planting and harvest ceremonial dances of many cultures. As the organic material either naturally becomes brittle and dry or is eroded away by an interplay of one leaf or pod brushing against another, the pieces break down, leaving only a delicate, linear vestige of structure. Paradoxically, to wear these objects would be to wear them away, denying the prolonged pleasure of ownership. However, if viewed as sculptural artifacts, they can be experienced as a poetical embodiment of transience.

HAI-CHI JIHN

MOTHER, A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG LADY
WISCONSIN ACADEMY GALLERY;
WISCONSIN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES,
ARTS AND LETTERS
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON
MAY 3-26, 2000

text by **TACEY ROSOLOWSKI**

A comb, a fan, a purse. Gloves, a mirror, bed slippers, dowry pillows. Hai-Chi Jihn interprets these objects in silver, plexiglass, and bronze for her most recent solo exhibition, *Mother, A Beautiful Young Lady*. In this well-integrated show, Jihn's series focuses on the collision of Chinese and Western culture and "rites of passage, devotion, struggle" in women's lives.

Mother, A Beautiful Young Lady--Fan was inspired by a linguistic accident that informs Chinese ritual: the words "fan" and "farewell" have the same pronunciation (*saahn*), thus the Chinese bride tosses a fan to the ground when setting off for her wedding ceremony, saying goodbye to her natal family.

Fans, of course, are traditionally worked in fabric (as are the majority of objects Jihn interprets for this exhibition). A young Chinese woman would embroider such items for her dowry, using a satin stitch to highlight the reflectivity of silk thread. Jihn recreates the fan, purse, slippers, gloves and pillows in silver, selected for its silk-like luster and a malleability that recalls fabric's softness. To suggest embroidery, she hand cuts the silver into detailed filigree, a repetitive task that forces her--as a metalsmith--to replicate the tedium of women's work and also the devotion that women brought (and bring) to their husbands and families. Moreover, by selecting patterns from Western lacemaking traditions, she suggests the historical impact of European decorative traditions on Chinese craft.

Fan demonstrates how the objects in Jihn's series seize on liminal moments when a woman is suspended between roles, generations, and cultures. *Fan* documents the bride's liminal state very literally with the engraved words, "farewell my dear father; I will be a loyal wife." Most of the pieces carry phrases--axioms for feminine behavior, promises, self-doubts--that shape a young woman's thoughts and behavior during the object's use. Jihn handles the implied gender commentary with considerable subtlety: as the viewer moves around the piece, the words appear and disappear in the light, just as they might float in and out of a young woman's consciousness, or appear and disappear for entire groups of women, in different cultures, who struggle to shake off the past and redefine their roles.

At the center of these wide-reaching issues are the objects themselves, created as mementos and objects of reverence for Jihn's mother (to whom this show is dedicated, and who passed away earlier this year). To scrutinize Jihn's delicate, lacy renderings, the viewer must come close, like the objects' owner, a lover, or a curious and devoted child. *Mother, a Beautiful Young Lady* invites the viewer into a seemingly private space, to examine a single individual's personal possessions. The intimacy is so strong, the viewer can come away overwashed with a sense of voyeurism.

The show's most haunting piece is *Bridal Gloves*, worked in a hand-cut lace pattern and embellished with roses (a bud and flower symbolize a bride's suspension between maidenhood and marriage). The gloves are softly rounded, disturbingly so, as if the lace still retains the shape of hands just removed. *Bridal Gloves* confronts the viewer with the most disquieting of liminal states: an implied owner who hovers between presence and absence, and very personal belongings that are referred to, but set at a distance by their silver re-interpretations. This was Jihn's intention for the entire show. She chose to work these objects primarily in silver and plexiglass (and to display them in a pure white space) in order to exploit their tonalities of white and grey: "When I install this, I want it to be very ghostly....floating in memory."

Successful in this regard, the viewer's sense of an unstable hovering is, however, only partially due to the objects' recollection of the past. The haunting mood is also created because this group of objects pulls the viewer into a complicated network of ambiguous referents and splintered identities. Most strikingly, these objects reinterpret women's work and each piece is haunted by visions of women as owners and makers. Their images multiply in a context where cultures collide and the meanings of feminine experience and sense of self shift. Jihn's show invites the viewer to explore the power of aesthetic objects, in their very concreteness, to generate a provocative and emotionally loaded placelessness.

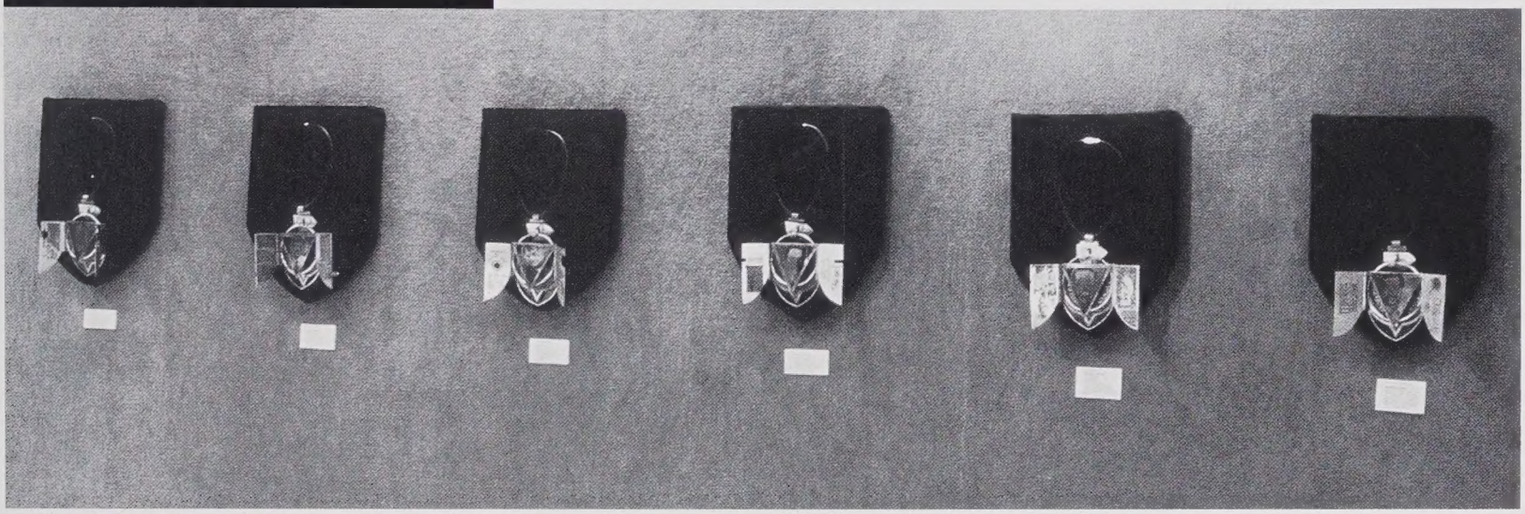
Tacey Rosolowski is a lecturer and writer. She lives in Utica, New York.

above left
Hai-Chi Jihn
Bridal Gloves, 2000
silver plated brass, silver,
11 x 5 x 3/8"

INTERACTIONS, RECENT WORKS BY NANCY MOYER

CLARK GALLERY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-PAN AMERICAN
EDINBURG, TEXAS
JANUARY 15 - MARCH 1, 2000

text by **DINDY REICH**



The University of Texas-Pan American exhibition works on several levels simultaneously. Connections occur between the viewer and the artist, the artist and her personal history, the wearer and the object, and the poetic and the physical. In Moyer's work, personal introspection and autobiography is married with metaphysical, spiritual, and mysterious inquiries. These concepts, as well as the personal and private nature of the series *The Marriage Proposals* can be peeled off one by one revealing deeper and more essential archetypes of human existence, love and loss, disappointments and successes, and foolishness and wisdom. These six strong neckpieces, would weigh heavily on the shoulders of whomever wore them, much as a serious proposal of marriage is not something to be taken lightly.

The pieces are hinged and when closed they are in the form of padlocks whose unlocked doors swing open to reveal the layering of symbolic and lyrical free verse written by the artist. They fall open, not meant to be locked away but instead always open. These are cathartic pieces meant to uncover buried information and let it penetrate our space freely.

Using computer-aided graphic design, Moyer began with the poetry, distilling the essence of each relationship, each journey into a concise piece of verbal remembrance. In each object, an inverted triangle is placed on top of a circular heavy wire form, symbolizing the instability of the relationship now stabilized by the completion of the experience. Text plays an important role here, as its texture draws one's attention around and below each photograph.

Skillfully photoetched words and pictures pull us into the visual space and into the artist's personal space. And it is a ponderous space spanning twenty-two years. These are worn memories, faded relationships, yet Moyer shows us the unending meanings that keep reverberating after any relationship of lasting importance. Simultaneously one can peel away the cultural aphorisms of our age and lay to rest social myths about love and marriage. What seems to ring out truthfully from this powerful series is that wisdom does come with age, that there is meaning to the rich fabric of a life well lived. Viewers are, in this case, fortunate to be privy to what would usually be private musings.

In 1996-1998, Moyer first began to use text and the written word. She was stimulated by the work of J. Fred Woell among others. A series of old plaques donated to the art school by the University and meant to be melted down as a source of bronze for casting inspired another series of work in this exhibition. Moyer created wax models of these plaques to emphasize the decimation of the National Endowment of the Arts and to the fragility of funding for the arts in conservative times. They are fragments of the original plaques and viewers are left with only a fragment of what arts funding should be about.

The neckpieces appear to be war-torn shards from an ancient battle. Kinetics and interests in archeology, Pre-Columbian art, and creation stories all come to play in these new pieces. In

the *Four Corners of the Earth Bracelet*, movable parts help one to interact with the creation story. Moyer is clearly aware of how in the second part of life individuals reflect on their past, their future, and the meaning of existence. She is unafraid to fashion a cross with the words "Cross at your own risk" embellished on it, making a clearly feminist statement on the role of women in the Catholic Church. She protests the inequality, the subservience. Her flatware has its own "uppity" attitude, it writes its own poetry. The spoon reads "Hold me tightly as I want containment of all that is yours" while the fork exclaims "Slowly and firmly press my tines into the soft tender flesh".

The poetry in these pieces adds to the deeper meanings in which events of the past are re-examined and tested. Even the least of the *Interactions*, the six rings, suggest an investigation into the current gemstone and mineral world. *Metalsmith's Finishing Bracelet* is from a current series which addresses the interrelationships found in metalsmithing: her work, her tools, and her technical assistants. The bracelet, though an object to wear, becomes the final production in which the technical crew, represented by buffers and polishers are given the opportunity to perform on stage and become the stars. The line between tool and work is erased and the wheels themselves can be kept in a convenient and attractive location. Nancy Moyer's exhibit contains humor, irony, passion, love, and sex. Who could ask for anything more.

Dindy Reich is a metalsmith who lives and works in McAllen, Texas

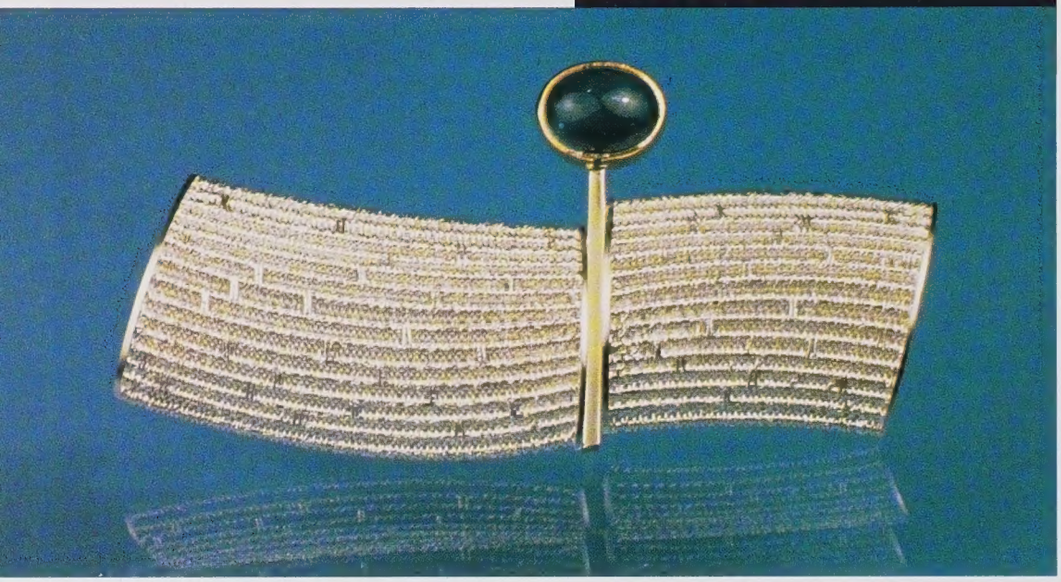
above
Nancy Moyer
The Marriage Proposal (installation view), 2000
mixed media
9 x 15"

left
Nancy Moyer
The Marriage Proposal: Salvation Proposal, 2000
mixed media
12 x 15"

FROM THE CENTRE TO THE EDGE

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT
MAINE COLLEGE OF ART
PORTLAND, MAINE
SEPTEMBER 16 - OCTOBER 21, 1999

text by **J.E. PATERAK**



above
Norman Cherry
Brooch
silver, 18k, tourmaline

The exhibition *From the Centre to the Edge* presented the work of four British metalsmiths, Norman Cherry, Maria Hanson, Terry Hunt and Jivan Astfalck. This was the first occasion in which these four instructors from Birmingham Institute's School of Jewellery were shown together as a group, and it demonstrated a range of thinking and making that aligns itself with the current philosophy of the school.

The strength of this show came from the boldness and refinement of the work of Maria Hanson and Norman Cherry. Hanson presented three bodies of work that were nicely displayed in three dramatically lit cases. Standing out were *Bodypiece #17 "Synthesis"* and from another series *Blue Square #2* and *Orange Square*. The bodypiece was a large three inch sphere with geometric pierced holes, on a cable finished with a repeating series of moon like crescent shapes where the clasp would otherwise be found. When the cable was doubled around the neck, the larger sphere hung centrally and the repeating crescents, descending down between the breasts, rested upon the sternum. *Blue Square* and *Orange Square* were much more lighthearted but were equally considered in their execution and resulting wearability. Bright, almost neon, nylon threads were threaded through precisely drilled holes in a grid, allowing the nylon to act as "electric" grass growing straight out. Whether they sit or spring off the shoulder they were beautiful and colorful. Hanson's attention to detail and craftsmanship finished these with interesting backs and mechanisms which functioned smoothly.

Norman Cherry's work results from years of research and experimentation within the same format: woven segments of silver or gold finished into finely crafted brooches. In each example this precious metal "cloth" has been created by weaving or plaiting different gauges of wire, resulting in ever so slight differences between them. Cherry's design sense remains similar throughout and may even seem a bit formulaic. Two segments are placed askew and attached by a bezel-set stone, setting them somewhat off balance and creating a slight tension. The beauty of these is in the details of the edges and thoughtfully considered backs of the pieces. Often a line engraver is used to finish edges or to decorate a bezel, but it is never overused. The mechanisms are simple to use and will function for years to come, a detail that takes time to master and that consumers expects.

In comparison to Cherry's and Hanson's pieces the work of the other two artists fell short, but perhaps this was may have been due to their transition to a gallery setting. Jivan Astfalck's work was dependent on titles and labels which were never put up (clearly a mistake on the behalf of the ICA). And the work of Terry Hunt seemed more interesting in the processes used than in the end results. Computers were employed in the design and making, yet the work lacked the interesting forms that some computer-aided design such as Joe Wood's latest work has. Hunt's connection to the computer and thus the resulting work, seemed more intellectual than visceral.

j. e. Paterak is a metalsmith who lives in Portland, Maine.

CHARLES KUMNICK PARTNERS: AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE

THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF TRENTON
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY
NOVEMBER 6, 1999 - JANUARY 2, 2000

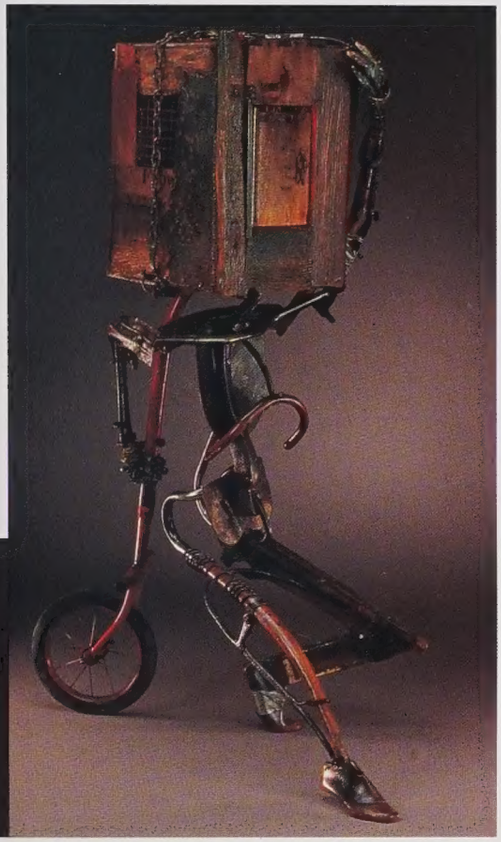
text by **MARJORIE SIMON**

Sometimes small museums are able to keep track of local artists who may be overlooked by the national media. Housed in an old mansion, The Museum of the City of Trenton has showcased the work of New Jersey sculptor and teacher Charles Kumnick, in a dual exhibition with Kumnick's wife, painter Chrisa Craig. Here it is Kumnick's constructions that are of interest, a combination of the domestic and universal in boxes, tables, and figurative sculptures consisting of found objects, recycled materials, and accomplished metalwork. Although Kumnick's "combines" are typical of twentieth century vocabulary of assemblage they resist easy nostalgia by alluding to darker undercurrents belied by the punning wordplay of their clever titles.

The strong figurative pieces cavort without being cute. Kumnick's understanding of the figure results in suggestive poses with attention to anatomical verity--the bicycle chain vertebral column, bifurcate scapula on *Juggler*, the sweeping bulge of thigh muscle on a standing figure. Where a found piece might make an awkward transition Kumnick makes, forges, or otherwise fabricates a better one. Although not strictly metal, the pieces are fabricated with a craftsman's sensibility and seamless marriage of

found object and fabricated wood- and metal-work.

Smaller figures show a sensitivity and intimacy missing in the very large technically proficient *S-man...Whatever*, which does show off Kumnick's customary prowess with sound and light. (In 1997 he was awarded the Special Prize in Metal and Light at the 3rd International Handwerkskammer Exhibition in Koblenz, Germany.) *A Wheel Man* can scarcely stand beneath the weight of his box of expectations. You can see right through his empty-box head and he's a little off balance. In *Wheely, I'm OK* the figure is perched seemingly precariously backing off the edge of the pedestal, as another



(literal) blockhead tries desperately to keep balanced. What are you going to do when your parcels all tumble down while you're trying to get the door open? You can almost see the beads of sweat popping off their brows as they struggle. They reveal a male vulnerability in the balancing act of life more commonly expressed in women's narratives.

The collection of *Memory Blocks* consists of nearly two dozen 6 x 6 x 6" cubes of salvaged wood, some resembling Kongo nail figures. They all rattle or make noise. Jumbled on the low pedestal they obviously recall children's wooden blocks, but with a dark version of child's play. At mid-life one has a less benign view of childhood and of life and these blocks somehow bear the accretion of assaults with which we assemble our memories.

Marjorie Simon is a metalsmith, a writer, and the chairperson of *Metalsmith*'s Editorial Advisory Committee.

above
Charles Kumnick
A Wheel Man
steel, wood, copper, brass, leather, rope
60 x 48 x 24"
Photograph by Philip Smith

JOHN RAIS
SALLY D. FRANCISCO GALLERY
PETERS VALLEY EDUCATION CENTER
LAYTON, NEW JERSEY

text by **BRUCE DEHNERT**

John Rais, Head of Blacksmithing at Peters Valley Craft Education Center in New Jersey, is drawn to an inherent individuality in works that at the same time parallel historic references. "I am interested in provocative design. This might be something as simple and eloquent as fashioning a fresh solution to a traditional concern." But, as Rais is quick to point out, "there have to also be abstractions." These abstractions in his most recent work appear to fall somewhere between hidden homages and an interest in the way some things function as a matter of natural survival, and how these functions are reflected in objects. Rais plays on the kinetic, summing up the ways that, or the feelings of how, something is put to use. It is when an object behaves perfectly that Rais insists that beauty can begin to be realized. While studying the kinetics of common hardware he was made aware of how objects are handled. "I want to make something that takes it out of its specific function and move it slightly...the scoop that you're not immediately sure of how it's to be used. I'm interested in raising questions like this with my work."

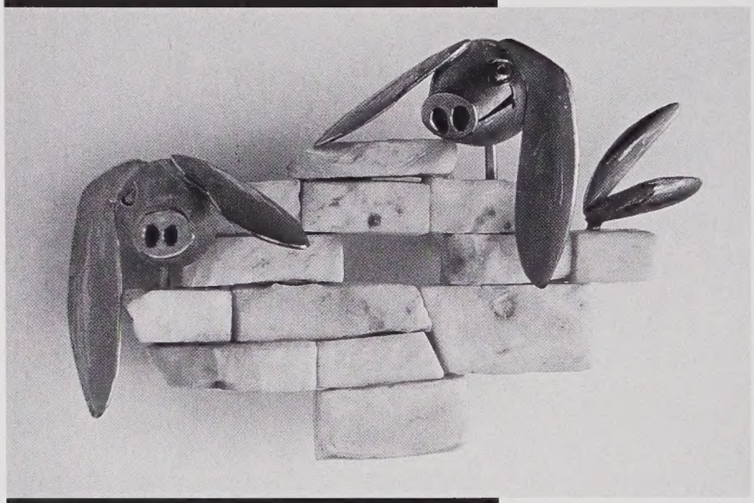
Rais, who has been using "the tool" as a stylized symbol for several years since graduating from Cranbrook Academy of Art, does so in an attempt to create an ambiguous narrative. For the craftsman this opens up the possibilities of meaning in his welded and hammered work. A hammer becomes a beanplate, becomes a frond, becomes a barrier to fire-as salt marsh fronds refuse to catch alight at the firemouth. These are subtle transformations reflecting a variety of narratives in the steel this artist uses. Though our understanding of reality is not a replacement for the experience of reality, Rais's works are analogous to excerpts from reality. His intention speaks of an attempt to create symbols for real experiences but not, to simply illustrate these experiences.

His most recent works, exhibited recently at the Sally D. Fransisco Gallery at Peters Valley, have a seamless quality in the junctures that Rais refers to as "change-ups." These are locations in a work where one material merges with another, or one form engages another. What has become an artistic quest was at first impulsive responses to that seamlessness that nature achieves through its own evolutionary impulse. The complexity of these works stems from, for example, quiet joinery laid next to abrupt riveting. Also, while symmetries in his work have shifted or are biased, somehow the artist maintains a peculiar sense of balance, particularly in his firescreens. Despite these dichotomies, one gets the feeling that nature intended it so.

Using combinations of altered but prefabricated meshes and typical stock steel, Rais creates vessels that raise questions about the degree(s) to which they function. These vessels are like denizens of the Middle Ages that have been cast into a post-modern free-for-all. They seem to have enjoyed a specific but mysterious use in another time or place, but as history has changed our ways so too has it moved Rais's vessels forward. It is possible that in their configuration as containers that their salvation remains intact.

Bruce Dehnert is the Head of Ceramics at the Peters Valley Craft Education Center

above
John Rais
Fireplace Sculpture, 2000
forged steel, bronze, brass, patina, paint
32 x 28 x 7"



MANFRED BISCHOFF

HELEN DRUTT GALLERY
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
SEPTEMBER 15 - OCTOBER 23, 1999

text by **BRUCE METCALF**

In his latest American exhibition, German jeweler Manfred Bischoff showed a group of rings and brooches made of gold, coral, gems, and occasional found objects. Each ring or brooch was accompanied by a drawing. The jewelry/drawing combinations were complemented by a series of eighteen portraits of notable Modern artists and writers, which was apparently an extended homage to the thinkers Bischoff admires most.

Bischoff first came to international notoriety in the early 1980s, making jewelry that seemed to have much in common with "graffiti art". At that time, he used bent wire to make scribbly drawings in space. I suspect he was continuing the direction established by his teachers Reinhold Reiling and Hermann Junger, both of whom practiced a discrete and tasteful version of Abstract Expressionism. Bischoff's interpretation of abstract expression was more immediate and gestural, and much more like drawing.

Since then, Bischoff has maintained the sense of drawing in his jewelry, but has returned to the more traditional medium of gold. Like many of his contemporaries, he has also tried to make a more "conceptual" jewelry. Bischoff's strategy is both literary and poetic; that is to say, he will make references to works of literature, but these references are often very generalized. The exhibition at Helen Drutt continued all these directions.

Where Bischoff's jewelry was once flat and often lightly built, the new work is fully three-dimensional and substantial. In one piece, he renders a deer's head in deep relief; in another, a mouse. These gold constructions are wonderful to behold for their mastery of the goldsmith's art. Bischoff's particular gift is to pull off convincing renderings, without making them stiff or formulaic. He finishes the gold in a matte yellow, which he highlights with burnished lines. The result is quite seductive, and very attractive when placed on the body.

And yet, my admiration was tempered by two nagging doubts. First, Bischoff is occasionally guilty of surprising lapses in craftsmanship. His findings were once a grudging concession to the fact that he was making jewelry. In this exhibit, he seemed to be paying more attention, but I found a few problems. On one brooch, he placed the classic double pinstem with C-shaped catch horizontally. Normally, this type of stem is placed vertically: should the stems ever become unclasped, gravity will still hold the brooch on the fabric. If you place this mechanism horizontally, gravity no longer serves as emergency backup. Is Bischoff really so willing to have his work be lost?

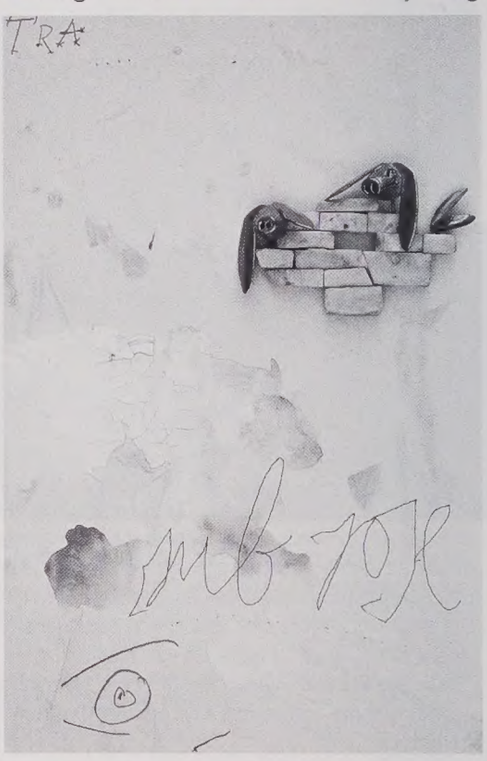
The drawings that accompanied each piece of jewelry were problematic. They were sketched in the most rudimentary manner possible, reminiscent of a child's doodles. Some of them struck me as, well, dumb. The drawing for the ring, *Solomon*, pictures Solomon's figure as a pink snowman, with scrawled circles for eyes, a smiley-face curve for a mouth, all in a hacked-out style. This offhanded way of drawing presumably represents the artist's white-hot creativity, untrammeled by consciousness or control: pure expression. But a sophisticated observer will immediately think of the expressionist fallacy, which holds that any outward sign of authentic emotion can be faked. The observer can't really tell the difference between a "real" scrawl that indicates authentic feeling, and a fake scrawl that is merely a stylistic exercise. The art world learned long ago to hold Bischoff's brand of expressionist scribbling at arm's length. Apparently, Bischoff hasn't heard the news yet. I would suggest that the contrast between the offhanded drawing and the skillful jewelry is more than a little peculiar.

The set of eighteen drawings was also problematic. The drawings are like caricatures; simple line drawings that offer a convincing likeness. Maybe I am missing something, but I don't think they are outstanding drawings. (To put my taste in perspective, I also don't think much of Francesco Clemente drawings, but I truly admire R.B. Kitaj's.) Bischoff must have thought pretty highly of his collection, because the set of eighteen cost three times as much as his most expensive piece of jewelry. Given that artists use prices as a statement about quality, the unmistakable subtext is that Bischoff thinks the drawings are three times as important as the best of his jewelry. It appears, then, that Bischoff is asserting his own hierarchy of form.

There can be no doubt that Bischoff is a serious man, and that he tries to embody some of his thinking in both the jewelry and the drawings. I believe Bischoff wants his art to function as a starting point for the viewer's meditation. This is the inverse of his own situation, where the object serves as a culmination to a period of intense thought. As such, he is not very different from any conceptual artist. The problem is this: if art is an experience primarily intended to direct thought, then the exact nature of the visuals is of marginal consequence . . . just as long as the work sets the mind in motion. Food for the mind takes a higher priority than food for the eye and hand.

Which, of course, raises a tough question: how do you evaluate conceptual art? For my money, good conceptual art brings the viewer up short, and forces a reconsideration. It makes viewers rethink an idea that they had assumed to be true. Duchamp does that, Adrian Piper does that. But Bischoff's drawings do little more than point. Each says, in effect, "Here's a great artist, here's a great thinker." They point at somebody else's art, and not much else. And, given the brevity of the drawings, they barely hold the viewer in contemplation of Bischoff's art itself. As food for the mind or the eye, they are barely a snack.

Like any ambitious art jeweler these days, Bischoff wants us to believe that his ideas are the most important aspect of his work. He wants to be a conceptual jeweler. But, in order to be convincing, his ideas have to be good, and his works have to stimulate some pretty profound thinking. I found this business of merely citing various heroes of Modernism to be unsatisfactory. Furthermore, I found Bischoff's apparent belittling of his own craft, and of some wonderful objects, to be both disturbing and a more than a little depressing. I don't see much point in conceptual jewelry, at the cost of making the jewelry itself secondary. That kind of practice marginalizes craft. Instead, can't object and idea be equal?



Bruce Metcalf is a writer, critic and metalsmith. He lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

above
Manfred Bischoff
Sub-Rose, 1999
gold, coral

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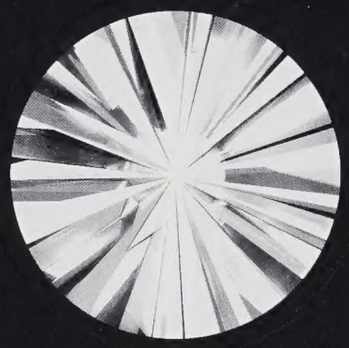

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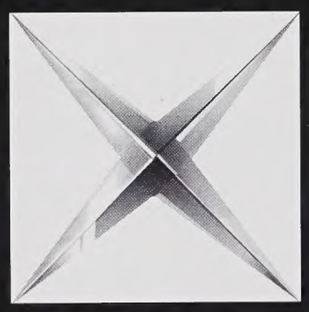

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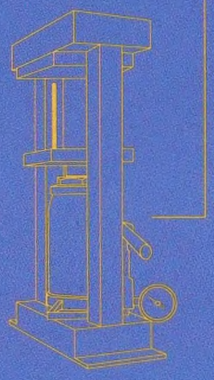

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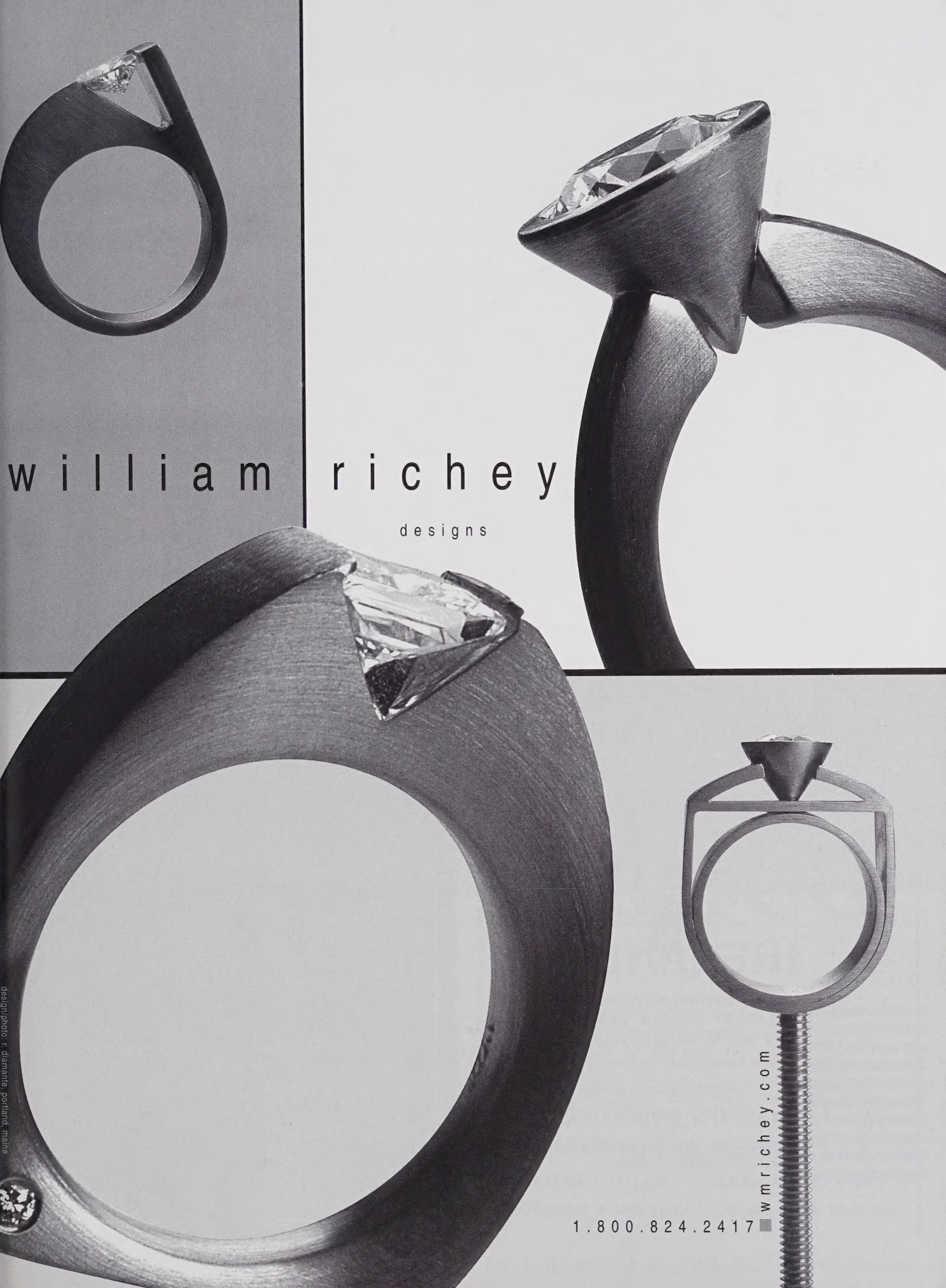
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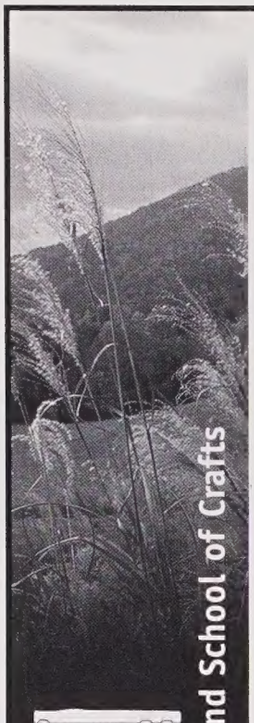

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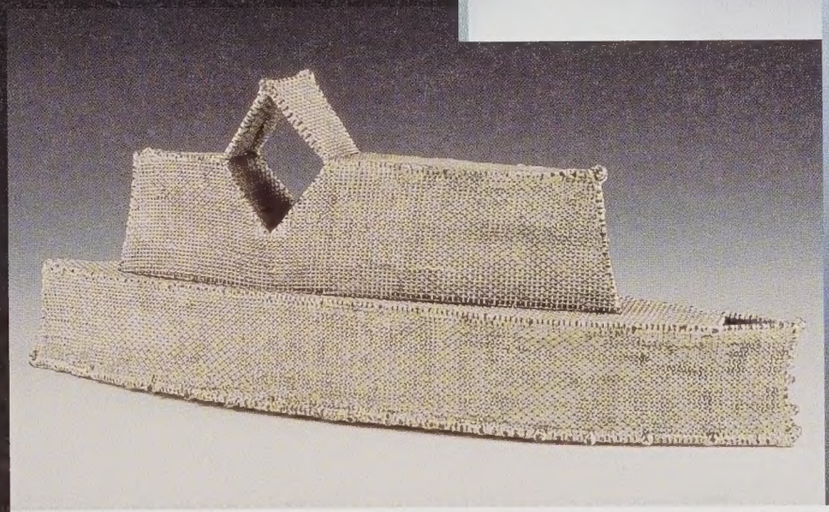

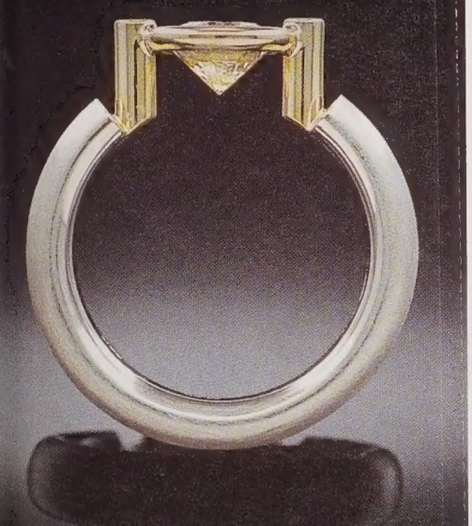

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Chris Y. Smith
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Biba Schutz
Circum Pendant, 1996
oxidized bronze and copper, sterling, fine silver
4 1/3 x 1 1/3 x 1 1/3"

(*Metalsmith* Magazine)
Marilyn Da Silva
Harlequin Pair 1, 1998
copper, brass, gold-plate, gesso, colored pencil, squares: 4 x 7 x 3"
diamonds: 5 1/2 x 6 x 3"
photograph by Don Felton

Billie Jean Theide
Butte #EF-8 (teapot), 1997
bronze, electroformed copper, enamel, patina
4 1/4 x 10 x 12 1/2"
photograph by Billie Jean Theide

Whitney Boin
Post Engagement Ring, 1996
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platinum, 18k
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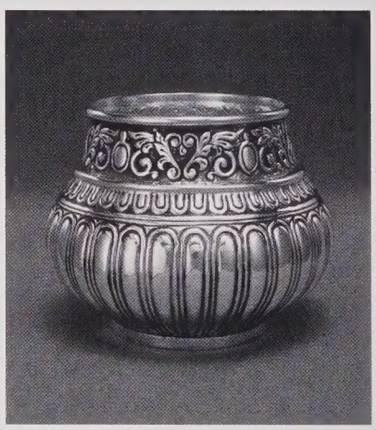

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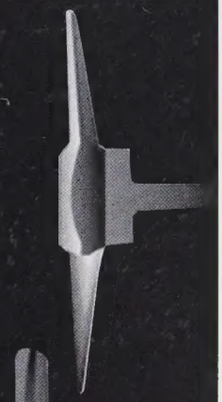

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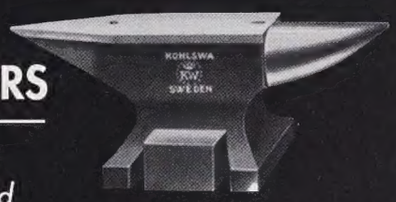

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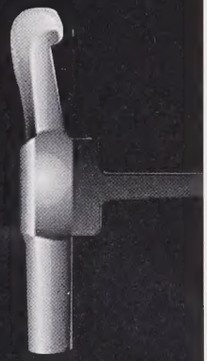

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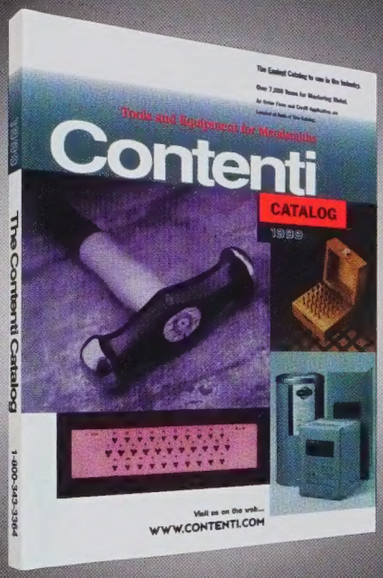

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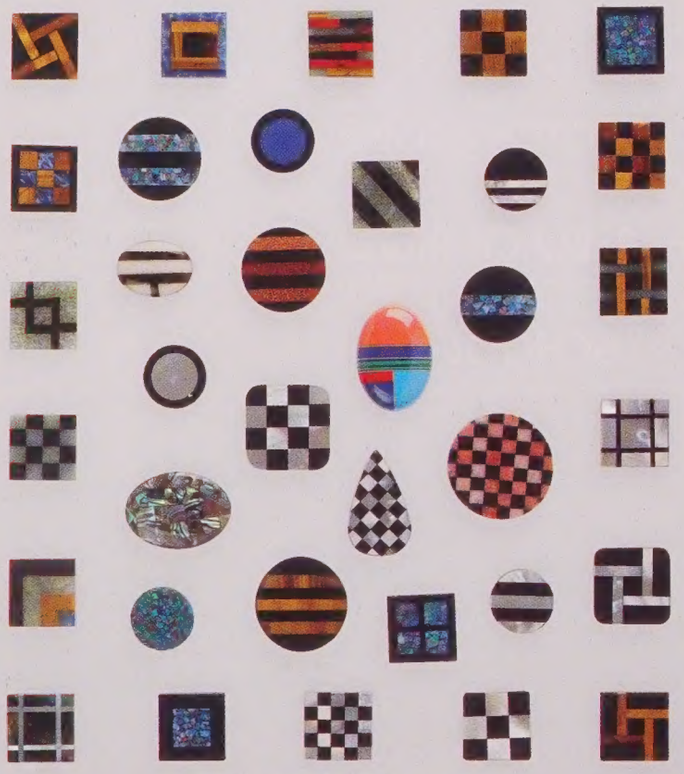

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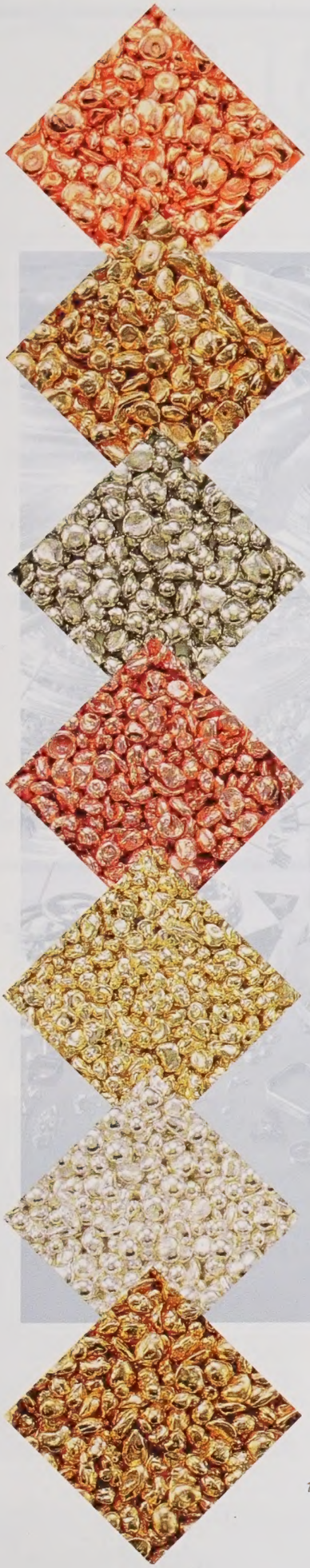

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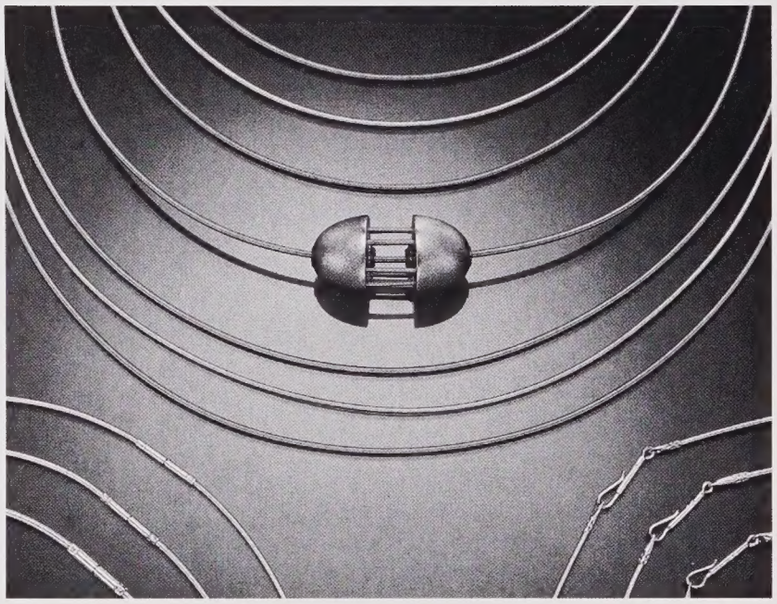

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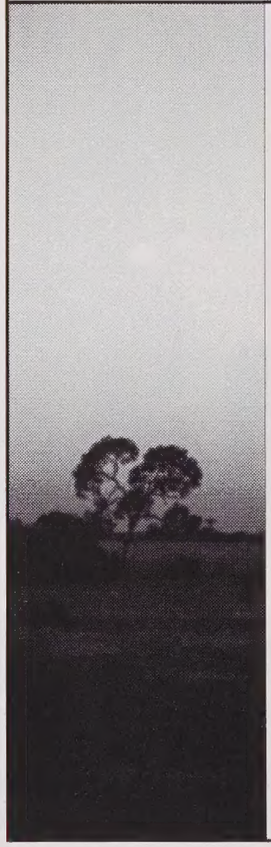

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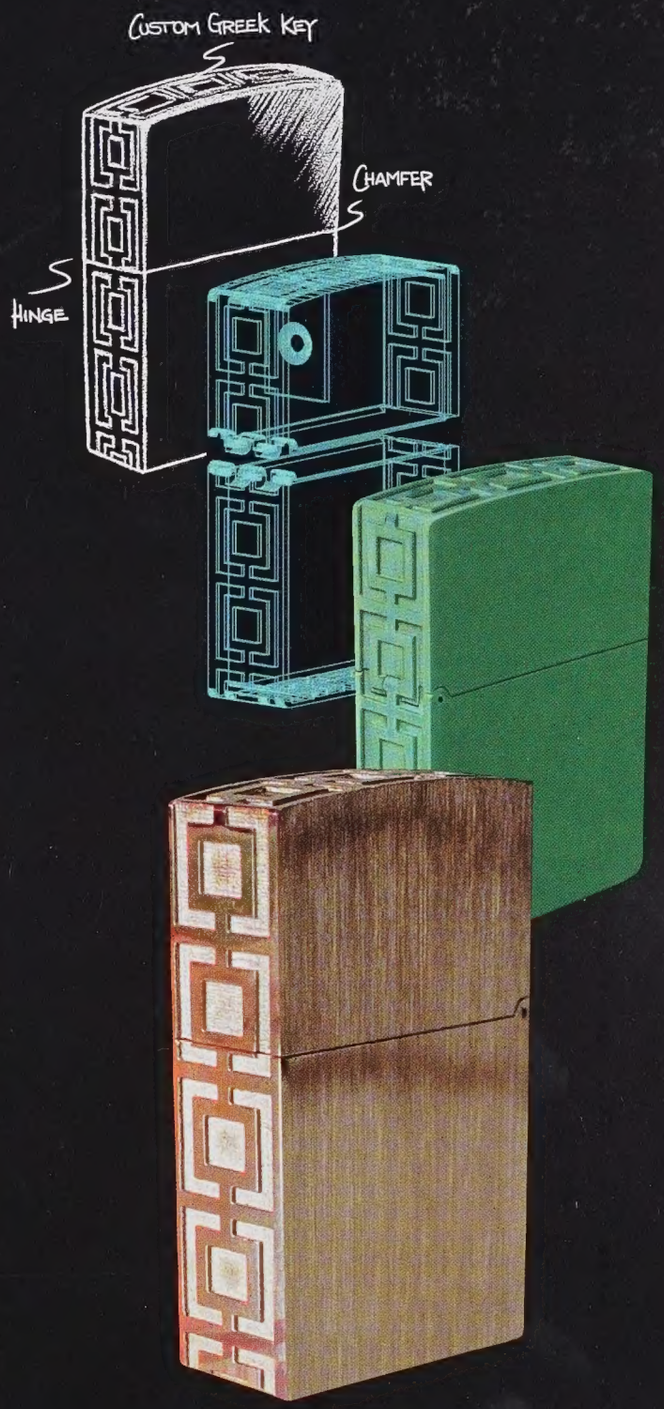

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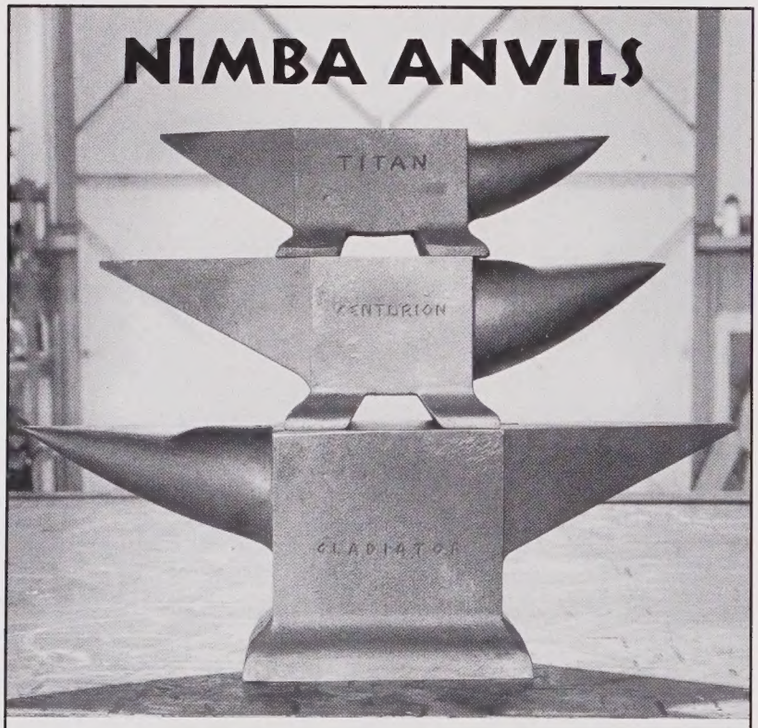

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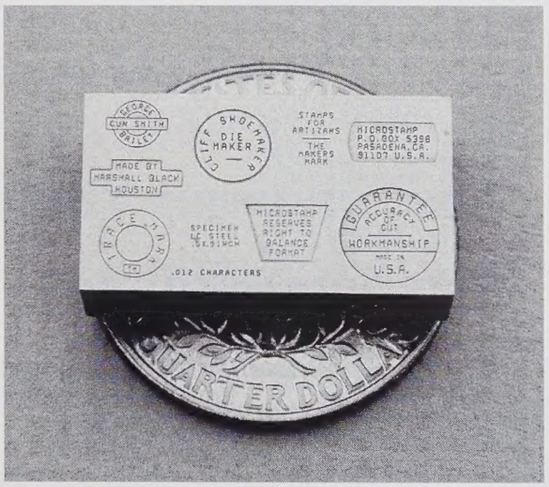

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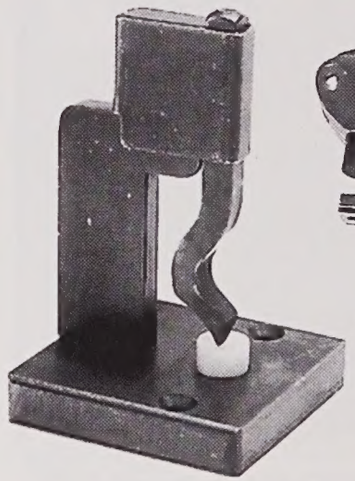

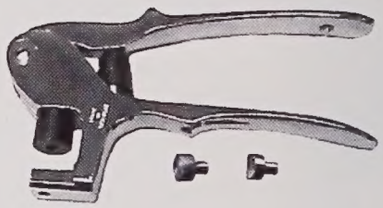

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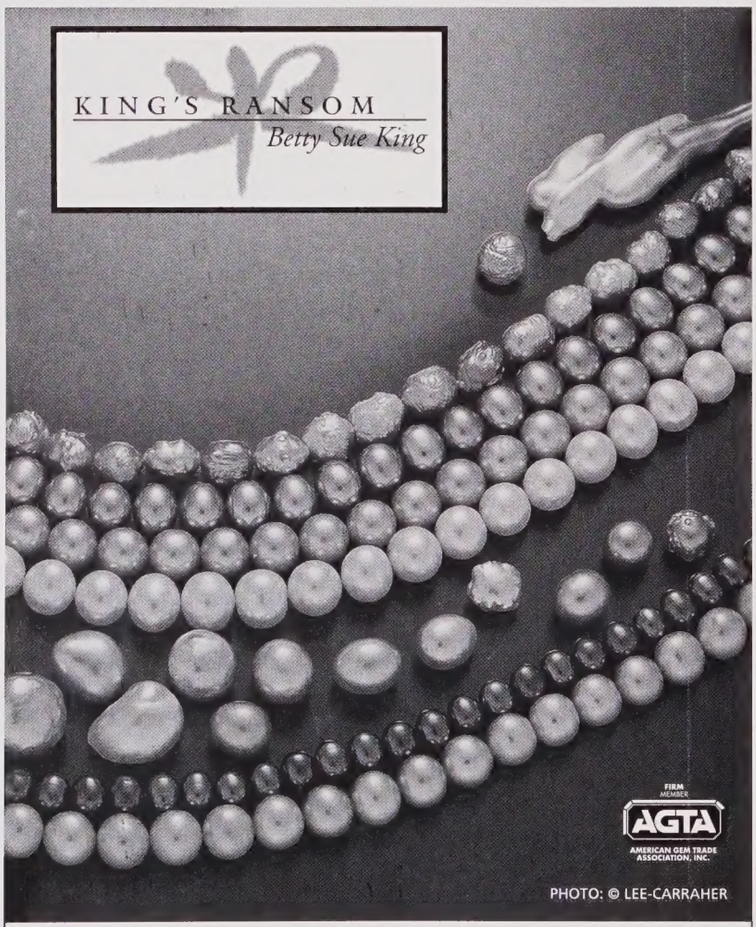

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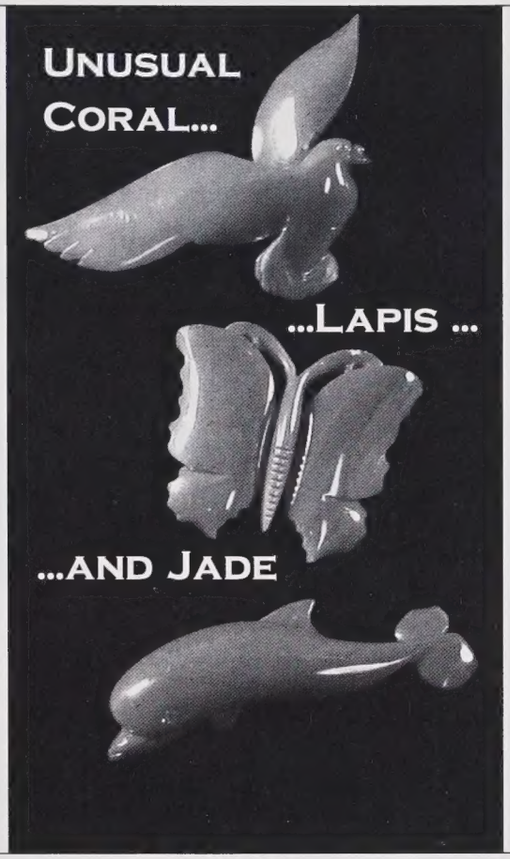

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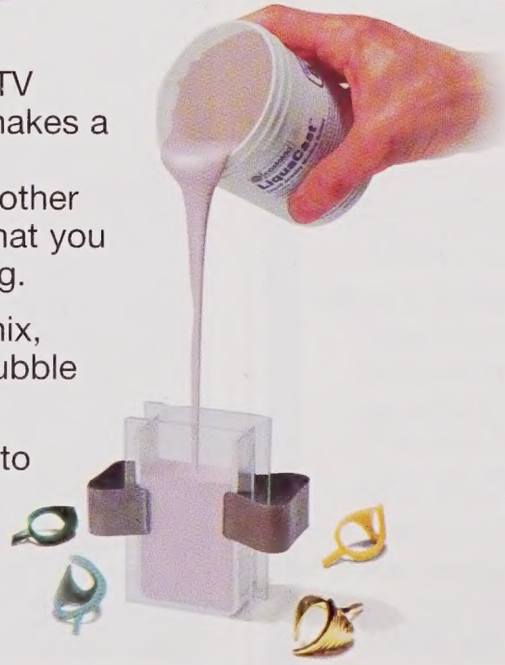

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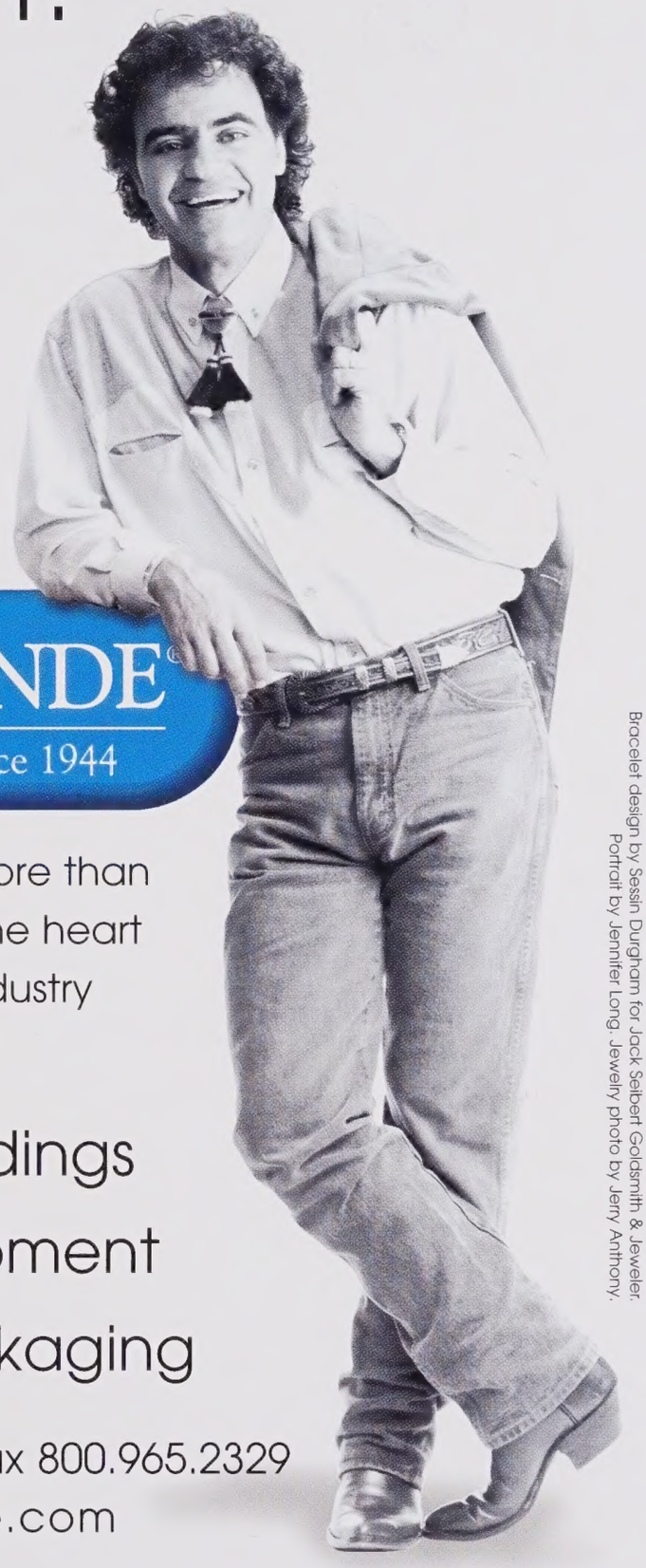

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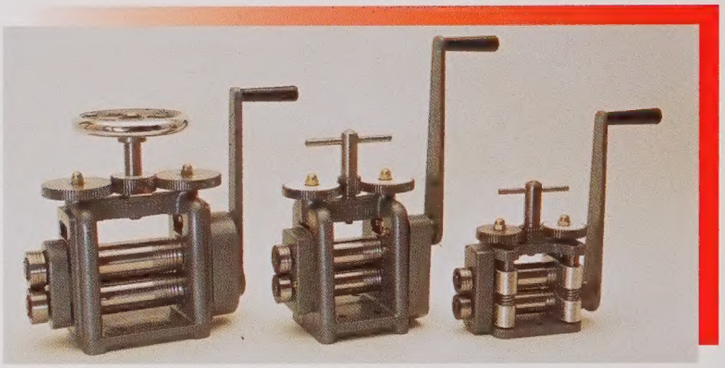

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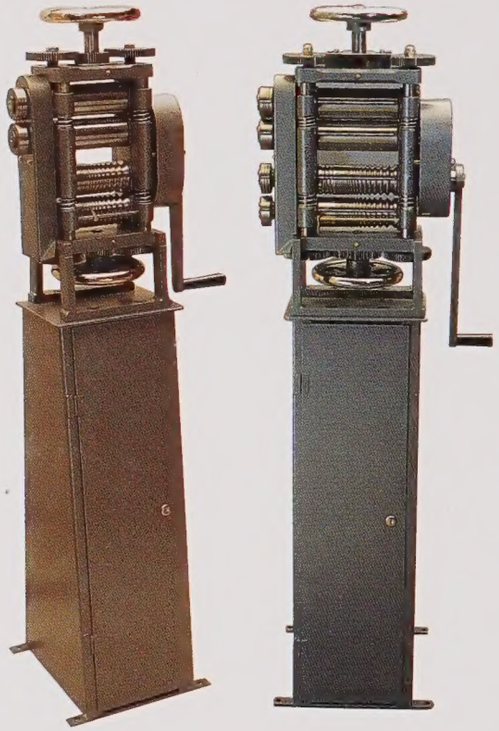

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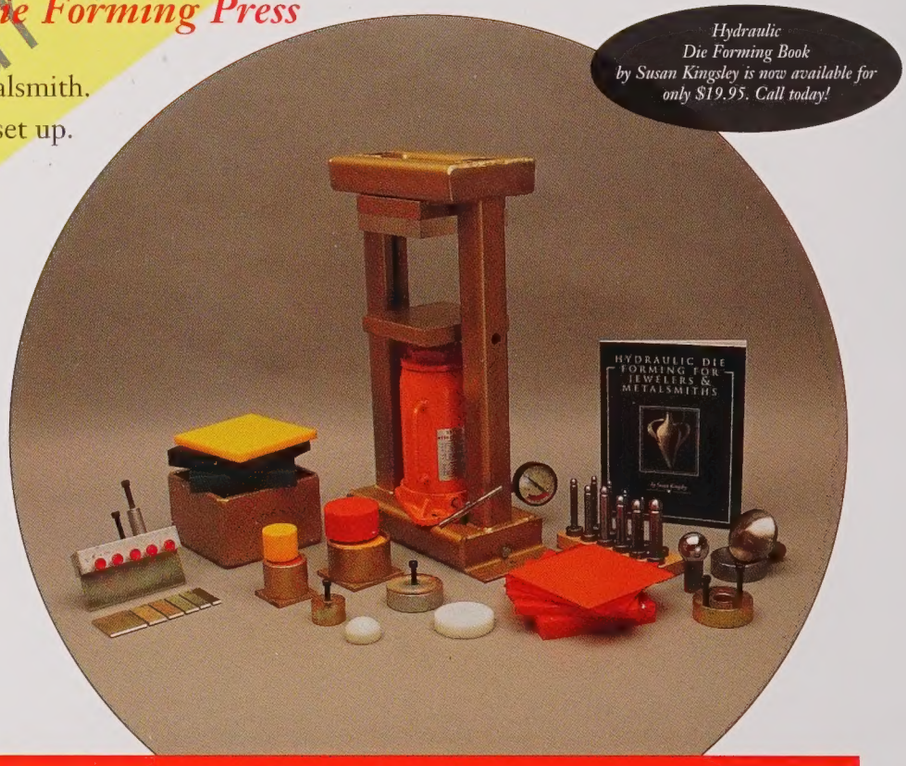

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